

MEGA M | U | L | T | I MICRO

YOUR CHURCH AS A MULTIPLICATION PLATFORM



Foreword by Peyton Jones

RALPH MOORE
with **TODD WILSON**

A MADE FOR MORE RESOURCE

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MegaMultiMicro: Your Church as a Multiplication Platform
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FOREWORD

A few years ago, Exponential gathered the heads of the biggest church planting networks and denominations to discuss the current crisis of the American church as reflected in two independent studies conducted on church growth. Eighty percent of churches in America are plateaued or in decline. Out of the 20 percent left, only 4 percent grew by planting new congregations to carry the torch into the future. Do the math and 96 percent of the church is no longer reproducing itself. It doesn't take a rocket scientist to conclude that the church in America is in trouble. The youth have already leaked out of the 16 percent of attractional churches that grow by adding numbers to the megachurch in a box. However, that's not the most disturbing statistic. Although 4 percent were reproducing churches (meaning they'd planted a church or a handful of churches), they could only locate one example of a church that was multiplying exponentially on this level.

Exponential multiplication is defined as a single church planting multiple churches that plant multiple churches to the extent that they have reached beyond the third level of multiplication from the original church. Jerusalem qualified as a multiplier, just as Antioch, Ephesus, and Rome eventually would in the first century. In 40 years, the early church turned the world upside down, so why does the number of multiplying churches register at zero?

In order to have kingdom expansion on the level of the first century, you need multiplying churches, but to have those, you need multiplying leaders.

That's where the whole thing bottlenecks.

Ralph Moore was one of the few Level 5 Multiplying planters that Exponential was able to locate in their search. He's spent more decades in ministry, living out what are in these pages than many of today's younger ministers have been alive. He stands as a modern day apostolic sender in the Spirit of the early church. We have much to learn from him.

Today's model of church aims at building upward, whereas the first century church was wired to expand outward. As form follows function, today's leaders graduate seminary unable to *do* most of what they *studied* in the book of Acts. We've been reproducing Pastors who act like Feudal Lords establishing dynasties, rather than ministerial ninjas who can accomplish kingdom expansion like the apostle Paul.

Scholars calculate that Paul planted 14-24 churches allowing him to spend 3-4 months with them on average. Imagine that. How was the greatest church planter able to plant at breakneck speed so that he could boast "I have fulfilled the ministry of the Gospel" from Jerusalem to Macedonia (Romans 15:19)? How can we recapture that momentum and make sure that there isn't just one movement of multiplication in America, but an army of movement makers?

Rather than the "one-stop" variety of church planter who dreams of building an epic church of his dreams, a level five multiplier leaves a string of churches behind them. They are serial, or sequential church planters like the apostle Paul. You could say that an apostolic planter is a pioneering, ground breaking,

foundation-laying, community-founding, team-building, mobile-discipling, self-replacing, multi-generational church multiplication missionary.

This book is a field manual for those who want to take things to the next level of multiplication.

But you can't achieve it by repeating the same pseudo karate moves of ministry that you've been doing all these years. You have to learn some new fighting techniques. And Ralph Moore knows some 5th level black belt martial arts.

The problem is that most ministers are frantically looking to find a silver bullet that will help them do what they're already doing better. As Ralph Moore points out in this book, growing bigger, or adding a new multi-site clone isn't that hard. It's like updating an iPhone from a lower version to a more recent update. But sometimes, to jump to a new level, you need an entirely new phone; an entirely new set of hardware. It's time to invest in a new system; a new structure. If you want to go to level 5, that's what it takes. And like so many things in the Kingdom of God, it's counterintuitive. In these pages you'll find that going big in kingdom expansion means going micro.

—Peyton Jones

Author of *Church Zero: Raising 1st Century Churches From The Ashes Of The 20th Century Church*, and *Reaching The Unreached: Becoming Raiders Of The Lost Art*.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Many thanks to the next generation of pastors who are reaching into places the US church hasn't touched. These people prove that microchurch works in ways our other tools cannot. The pastors and leaders mentioned in the book taught me a lot along the way.

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INTRODUCTION

“He maximized all he had!”

These are the words I want to see on my tombstone. Every one of us hopes that we will someday hear, “Well done, good and faithful servant.” For me, getting there means leveraging every one of my spiritual gifts, skills and resources for the Kingdom of God.

If you’re reading this, I bet you feel the same way. In these pages, I’m hoping to help you along your way. My purpose is to help you satisfy both the investments and callings that God put in you. I want you to die happy, knowing you did all you could with what you had.

What would it take for you to be part of God’s work in bringing a million people to faith in Jesus Christ? I’m not talking about mass media, but direct disciple making. I believe that every church pastor could make one simple paradigm shift that would drive their lifetime accomplishment from thousands of disciples

to at least hundreds of thousands, if not millions. And those of us touching fewer than a hundred people at a time could multiply to reach thousands. It's been done in other countries, and it can be done in the United States.

Dave Ferguson presses this even harder in the book, [*Hero Maker: Five Essential Practices for Leaders to Multiply Leaders*](#). Beginning with a goal of evangelizing a million people over his life he accepted a challenge from Neil Cole to write his current vision on a paper napkin then multiply it by a thousand. The result was a billion people. His vision far surpasses mine, but it holds great promise if there is a workable strategy to back it up. The key to this is making disciples who make disciples and multiplying churches that multiply churches to the fourth generation (2 Timothy 2:2).

In this book, I'll teach you how to *widen the pathway* into pastoral ministry. We'll discover how the Lord may have already answered your prayer for more labor for the harvest. Finally, we'll explore how a local church can produce a movement of reproducing churches.

Read along while I teach you *one option* for multiplying your church into an expanding movement of churches. This is no end-all solution for world evangelism, but it is a simple, workable approach to church multiplication that any leader can implement. It's a low-dollar, but high-commitment investment. If you care more about evangelizing the world than building a single church, this book may be an answer to your prayers. Of course, as I said, it's one option among many. Everybody believes their practice is the best since the invention of ice cream. I'm not arguing with any other model. The goal is to expand your options.

A Simple but Eternity-Altering Shift

Form tends to follow function. But we often focus on form without closely examining function. For decades we've favored "bigger is better" over a strategy that assumes that "more is better." Sadly, it hasn't produced enough church growth to keep up with the population let alone bring the world to Jesus. We need to shift into a strategy for multiplication rather than addition. It's the only way to disciple a nation, or nations.

For the sake of a common vocabulary, we'll look at becoming movement makers through the lens of the book [*Becoming a Level 5 Multiplying Church*](#).¹ In this paradigm, Level 1 churches are in decline, struggling to survive. Churches at Level 2 hold their ground but may grow complacent and stagnate. Level 3 leaders value numeric growth above all else (whether or not the church is growing—a lot of Level 1 pastors are Level 3 wannabes). Level 4 churches reproduce by adding services, sites and even planting new churches, often at great cost. Level 5 congregations multiply rapidly, mostly by discipling Christ followers into church leaders.

The major differences occur between Level 3 and Level 5 pastors. At Level 3 the scorecard is all about the number of people attending services while Level 5 focuses on the percentage of a given population brought into a discipling relationship with Jesus. Level 3 operates like a magnet. It draws leaders toward its easy-to-conceive measure of success, as it offers side benefits as this type of success is enjoyable to any leader. As a magnet it also pulls leaders away from levels 4 and 5. Once you build the machine at Level 3, you are forced to sustain it. This makes it difficult to give away members, money and leaders. The tension here is very real and those struggling with it deserve great respect.

Three Assumptions

Let's start with three assumptions that might help move us along a natural pathway from mega to multisite to multiplication. They show that repeating the forms of the recent past will only *hinder* the kind of multiplication enjoyed by the first century church. Understanding these assumptions will help us build new *forms* of ministry that better service the *function* of the Great Commission.

Assumption 1: Most megachurch pastors are apostolic (e.g. pioneering, entrepreneurial, activators, etc.), but not all apostolic pastors lead megachurches

An apostolic leader, whether in a large place or small, feels the need to keep moving. Some, like Paul, move from city to city. Today, most shift from project to project while extending the boundaries of the gospel.

These people are catalyzers. If this is you, you naturally spark change. You are a mapmaker, leading others on your latest adventure. Or, perhaps just a little more cautious, you may closely follow the mapmakers as an early adopter of fresh ideas.

Others may deride you as a radical or a revolutionary, but your heart is to see the gospel fill the earth. And you believe that constant change is necessary to the task. Apostles instinctively seek new territory. If we can refocus this energy toward multiplying ourselves and our churches, we can see our footprint grow to astonishing proportions beyond the specific work of our hands.

Assumption 2: Every church contains the DNA for a movement

Churches around the world have morphed from single congregations into fast-growing movements. This is the history of Europe dating back to Barnabas, Paul and the folks in Antioch.

Most American denominations got their start in the same way. The Methodist movement traces its strength back to Francis Asbury. Baptists became the largest segment of American Christianity by rapid church multiplication, spawned from local churches. Recent decades saw three local churches, Calvary Chapel (Costa Mesa, California), The Vineyard (Yorba Linda, California) and Hope Chapel (Hermosa Beach, California) morphed into movements chronicled by University of Southern California professor Donald Miller in his book, [*Reinventing American Protestantism*](#).²

Make no mistake. This can be done. We don't have to shrink into oblivion. It takes a shift in the way we view church coupled with a different perspective toward mobilizing church members. Instead of viewing a congregation as only a portal into localized disciple making, we can change the world by visualizing it as a platform to launch churches and disciple making beyond our immediate geographic context.

The key is leadership. If you're dissatisfied with the status quo, you are a potential catalyzing movement maker. My goal is to get you there.

Assumption 3: EVERY church should multiply

The rise of the American megachurch is both inspiring and disappointing.

The megachurch movement in the US is a recent phenomenon, dating back to the 1970s. The number of these churches has grown quickly, and they are effective in evangelism. Their rise is positive, but congregations exceeding 1,000 members still account for only about 10 percent of all evangelical churchgoers.³ We cannot expect them to shoulder the load of cultural change alone.

Megachurches grow faster than mid-size or smaller congregations. That's how they got to be "mega." A lead pastor with a winning personality, an innovative approach, and a suburban location all factor into success.

Growth-restricting obstacles like traffic, high land costs, and simple logistics gave rise to the tremendous move toward multisite churches. But even these innovations are beginning to bump against logistic ceilings.

Pulling together the above assumptions points to a *singular* problem: Our focus on building bigger, addition focused "come and see" churches, without a balanced "go and be" dimension, does inhibit most pastors from experiencing multiplication.

Our forms tend to restrict the methods Jesus gave to us for accomplishing the Great Commission. The Great Commission remains unfulfilled, apostolic leaders focus on single congregations instead of multiplying in other locations and few local churches reach the potential that lies dormant within them. We need new scorecards for success that will allow us to embrace *new wineskins* for action.

Most apostolic leaders focus their gifts on addition because it fuels the scorecard of success that we've embraced in the church growth movement of recent decades. Multiplication then appears more complicated and inaccessible because our addition paradigms get in the way.

Fortunately, you don't need to lead a large church to multiply. Level 5 multiplication starts with making disciples who make disciples and moves toward pastors who make pastors of leaders in their churches. Multiplication movements always grow out of disciple making movements. Want to become a Level 5 church, start by becoming a Level 5 disciple maker.

If you're open to the possibility of becoming a Level 5 disciple maker who leads a Level 5 church, let's ride.

SECTION 1

WHY MULTIPLY?

CHAPTER 1

Multiplication is the Logical Next Step

The great function of the church is the Great Commission: “... to go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you” (Matt. 28:19-20). You might summarize this as everyone on earth praying, “Thy will be done ...”

Form is another matter. Both a Level 3 addition church and a Level 5 movement seek to make disciples of all nations. But the forms and strategies they implement differ significantly. Our ongoing task is to discover the most Biblically consistent, effective form to fit the function of world domination through love that works for each of us.

Multiplication is Biblical

The primary explanation for why we should shift from forms and strategies which produce addition to those resulting in multiplication is that it is biblical.

Regardless of the forms we choose, we must be faithfully committed to, and be good stewards of, Jesus' command to "go", "make" and "teach" in the Great Commission. The bulls-eye of these action words is a surrender to the Lordship of Jesus that produces transformed lives.

Arguably, the Level 3 church seeks to optimize the teaching dimension while falling short on the "go and make disciples" bit. The Level 5 multiplying church must seek the holistic intersection of all 3 commands.

In the Greek, "go" communicates, "as you are going"—suggesting that being a follower of Jesus is something we do naturally, on a regular basis. While the fruit of our faithfulness to this command produces fruit geographically to the ends of earth, it's not referring to a special "missionary mode" reserved for a few select saints. Instead, Jesus expressed this part of the Great Commission to define a way of life for His followers, a mindset to inform their understanding of what it means to be His disciples. Disciples are always in a state of readiness to engage in this mission.⁴

In its early days in Jerusalem, the Church functioned at Level 3, locally. It became a megachurch in one day and remained that way until persecution forced change. It took on Level 4 reproduction attributes (adding preaching points) only after Saul's persecution (Acts 8:1; 11:19- 20). From Antioch outwards, it looks like Level 5 multiplication.

The Jerusalem church was a megachurch that almost accidentally planted churches due to persecution. The first church planters were those who ran away due to the threats of Saul of Tarsus (Acts 7:57-8:4). Philip got something going in Samaria and if it lasted, it became a church, though Acts mentions no Samaritan follow-through. Others spread the gospel in Cyprus, Cyrene and Antioch because of the same mistreatment. There seems to have been little motivation for intentional church planting in Jerusalem.

Antioch, however, sent missionaries who planted churches. Antioch was a substantial church that intentionally commissioned some of its best leaders to take the gospel to other locations. This single congregation generated the movement in the West that we enjoy today. Real multiplication is found, not only in the wider travels of Barnabas and Saul, but specifically after Paul was stoned and left for dead in Derbe.

He and Barnabas snuck back into that city and went on preaching “When they had preached the gospel to that city and had made many disciples, they returned to Lystra and to Iconium and to Antioch, strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith.... And when they had appointed elders for them in every church, with prayer and fasting they committed them to the Lord in whom they had believed” (Acts 14:21-23 ESV). When they appointed select disciples as elders they, themselves, became Level 5 church multipliers.

The choice is never to grow *or* to plant. It is always to do *both*. They should naturally happen together. The power is in the AND, not the tyranny of the OR.

Addition and multiplication should walk hand-in-hand. All churches should attempt growth, and all should reproduce

themselves toward new congregations. There is little merit in size for size sake. And there is nothing gained by keeping a church small. This book is *not* an argument for small over large. In fact, using a multi/micro approach, a church of 30 can reproduce as easily as a church of 3,000 (and smaller might actually make it easier).

The bottom line: Let your church grow as big as it can, but whatever its size, seek to value multiplication as the intentional and natural outcome of healthy, Biblical disciple making. Do this Jesus' way, as you seek to "make" and "teach" don't leave out the "go."

We've Got Room to Expand

The second reason why we should multiply our congregations is that we have lots of room to grow and evangelize our country.

By 200 A.D., the Church had grown from zero to about 1.8 million out of the earth's population of 250 million people, or about 7/10ths of one percent of the world. That incredible growth came mostly through multiplication. Eighteen centuries later, roughly 33 percent of the people in the world call themselves Christians. That's good, but two-thirds of the people on earth remain estranged from Christ.

Christianity currently grows faster in Nepal than anywhere. Nigeria boasts the highest rate of Christ followers per capita. Asia, Africa and Latin America see serious church growth in the macro sense. Church multiplication is a primary cause for success in these nations.

But this kind of growth isn't happening in America.

Between 1990 and 2006 the number of people born in the United States equaled the size of the church in 1990. The

downside to this is that the church was almost exactly the same size in 2006 as it was in 1990. Sixteen years and many more large churches brought no measurable growth to Christianity in America.⁵

Evangelicals numbers are growing. But compared to the overall population, our share of the pie is now smaller. Between 2007 and 2014, the evangelical segment of the U.S. population fell by 0.9 percent.⁶

It is possible for your church to grow rapidly while falling behind the growth curve in your own community. More people attend U.S. churches than ever before but when measured against the larger population, we're still a shrinking minority. We need to stop measuring church growth and begin measuring cultural penetration.

Moreover, church attendance doesn't always translate into cultural "lift." We focus on evangelism while neglecting poverty, crime and oppression. To combat this, churches have coined terms like "missional church," or "missional Christians." Every church should reflect Jesus' calling, "The Spirit of the LORD is upon me, for he has anointed me to bring Good News to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim that captives will be released, that the blind will see, that the oppressed will be set free, and that the time of the LORD's favor has come" (Luke 4:18-19, NLT). Our mission expects true spiritual transformation of communities, not just individuals.

Let's stop rejoicing over the crop in the barns. We need to look at the fields yet to be harvested. To pastor the biggest church possible is noble, but it still doesn't lead to the greatest impact.

Both the church and the culture will change drastically in the next two decades. The escalating secularization of our culture will

result in a continued social reorganization with values foreign to the gospel. Change is upon us, and it's mostly negative if we steer the same course as before. But it can change for the better if you and I choose a different strategy from what appeared effective while we lived it.

From Mega to Multi to *Multiplication* Movement

The third reason for multiplying churches, instead of just getting bigger, is logistical. We're bumping against a ceiling. No church will grow beyond the gifting and abilities of its leaders. Huge churches have hugely gifted leaders, but even these guys bump against logistic ceilings. Land use, parking space and other factors produced the multisite movement which does help churches move to more aggressive addition growth (including reproduction). However, multisite governance realities and increasingly complex management systems inevitably hold them back from true multiplication. The multisite model will achieve Level 4 reproduction at best.

Small to Medium Church Multipliers

We have Jesus' promise and commands, a calling and desire to be faithful and fruitful, and vast resources at our disposal. However, most church planting in America is the purview of small to medium churches. More than 20 percent of new churches come from churches numbering fewer than 100 in attendance. Congregations smaller than 500 people produce a whopping 60-plus percent of church plants. The good news is that our largest churches are beginning to pick up on church planting. Some are

starting with small groups as extension services and experimenting from there.⁷

Churches as Launch Platforms

What if every church could see itself as a launch platform for new churches, or compare itself to an internet platform like Facebook which would allow members to take the gospel story to people in their unique circles of influence? Our larger churches often look more like an entertainment site—Netflix comes to mind, than a platform for members to carry a message into their varied communities. What if we looked at the “bicultural” people from different racial groups, or different socio-economic backgrounds (extremely rich or extremely poor) as bridges into their own cultures? They could be compared to Barnabas or Paul, who were Jews reared in Gentile cities. These people could learn pastoral ministry in one culture, then reproduce it in another.

A couple of decades ago, Ralph Winter wrote about “cultural dissonance in evangelism and church multiplication.” If I, as a white middle-class person, begin discipling an unchurched, white middle-class friend who grew up in church, then that is E-0 evangelism. Make that a person like me who grew up with no church background or understanding of the gospel, and you get E-2. Suppose I begin discipling a Chinese-American who grew up in a Buddhist family; then, we’re looking at E-3. In other words, there are three cultural barriers between me and the person I intend to disciple. Most churches attempt E-3 by asking people to make the cross-cultural journey from where they live to fit into “our culture.” They not only need to heed our message, but they are also required to adopt our cultural trappings. This makes little

sense. We're asking potential converts to make the missionary journey instead of doing it ourselves.

We readily spend huge amounts of money to send missionaries overseas as traditional E-3 missionaries. With the advent of freelance church planters trained in local churches, I'm proposing that we do E-3 evangelism in our own cities and towns. Let's stop asking people to become like us. Instead, let's send people who fit into both worlds so they can address each context in culturally appropriate ways.

What if we could find a way to make experimenting with church multiplication less risky and more pervasive? What if Level 3 churches became launch platforms for new churches rather than new sites. They would immediately achieve Level 4 status, release the new churches to launch others, at will, and you hit Level 5.

My Story

Let's start with a disclaimer. I've coached many of the people you'll meet in this book—but my experience rests there. As I write, I'm newly retired as a vocational pastor. I've got a new ministry job and am also busy planting a church as a freelance pastor in San Diego. But as a movement, Hope Chapel has only dabbled in new expressions beyond mega and multisite churches. However, we are beginning to pursue it as a model for planting any church. Even if we plan to grow a large congregation we'll want a pastor to prove that they could do what Rick Warren did—plant in a living room.

Over the years, I've pastored two (smaller) megachurches, and we've grown a movement of free-standing medium-sized churches. We allowed them to function as a movement rather than as a network or mini-denomination, which gave us the freedom to focus on disciple making rather than governance (more about the

difference between networks and movements later). But it seems that what small churches have done in the past can also be done by megachurch pastors, especially those with multisite experience.⁸

Reviewing Level 5 Multiplication

Before we go any farther, let's review the Level 1- Level 5 multiplication model. Think of a Level 3 congregation as a high-impact church; some have used the term, "lighthouse church." Some Level 3 churches have tens of thousands of members. Others may represent just a few hundred people in a smaller community. Level 4 is a church that clones itself in a variety of ways. Most often, this takes the form of multiple church services. But it can add capacity by planting a *network* of churches that look much like the sending congregation.

A Level 5 congregation seeks to move a step beyond networking to producing churches both capable of, and free to, pursue multiplication without a great deal of interference from the founding church. A multiplication movement looks like a scattering of boutique shops or restaurants.

Your Church As A Launch Platform

Your personality will draw you toward either Level 4 or Level 5 if you decide to launch churches. But, whichever path you choose, how can you do it efficiently and effectively?

We're looking for radically different results. Church multiplication easily trumps single-location addition. But, perhaps a major redirection isn't the best idea. If something is fruitful, hang on to it. But, you could run two operating systems at one time. A measure of caution accompanies any venture into new territory. I

once switched between Windows and IOS. The learning curve was steep. I discovered that I could partition my hard drive and run both systems at the same time.

Depending on what I was trying to do, I could move back and forth between systems and software. My proposal is that you run two systems *concurrently* if you are making the leap from Level 3 to Level 4 or Level 5. Keep doing business as usual while experimenting with the new system on the side. Compartmentalization is key here, though as there is nothing gained by destroying what you have along the way to something new. Graduating from Level 3 is more about evolution than revolution.

But while that advice holds for Level 3 guys, if you are planting a new church you do want to embrace a different operating system than that which may have birthed you. As you plan a new church, you should certainly build it around a Level 5 multiplication operating system. Take your key leaders through [*Becoming a Level 5ive Multiplying Church*](#) as a discipling exercise. A book that would help you as the key leader is [*New to 5ive: Starting a Level 5 Multiplying Church*](#). Build your culture around the challenges you uncover as you do this.

Learning a New OS

I want to introduce an operating system that we've used, successfully, in the United States. However, I learned it on a teaching trip to Sri Lanka. By reading their story you may be able to pick up on the operating system I propose with more courage than caution. Think of it as a parable. Stories can teach better than facts and figures.

Often, we discover that the world outside the United States is forced to act more like the first century church due to persecution and poverty. Their discoveries make good lessons. Look at this example of a multiplication movement instigated by a single church operating among a Hindu/Buddhist population.

So, here goes the story... It was late. My ride to the airport hadn't shown up. Travel during a civil war intensified my anxiety. If the driver didn't show soon, I would have no place to stay. After eight days of teaching, I had neglected to obtain local phone numbers. I was in trouble. I wouldn't even know how to use the phone system to book a hotel room.

Sri Lanka was at war with itself. The airport parking lot was closed to outside vehicles. Upon the arrival of a flight, you took a cab from the terminal building to a heavily guarded gate on the perimeter of the parking lot. To depart, you reversed the process. The threat of terrorism permeated everything.

When the driver finally arrived, he drove a new BMW. This one hadn't yet come to the United States. Being a car guy, I was curious about the vehicle. Turns out he owned the BMW distributorship for all of Sri Lanka. This was a wealthy guy—he was also a church planter several times over. He was late because one of the two churches he currently pastored held a goodbye party for him. It was his last night with that group. He proudly told me that the following week he would plant his fifth autonomous “microchurch.” The man was a successful three-career pastor. However, he received only one paycheck – from his BMW business. While he was tri-vocational, his story can lead us toward a new concept: *a microchurch led by a single- salary, discipleship-trained, bivocational/freelance church planter.*

As we worked our way past sandbag-fortified checkpoints and machine gun-toting soldiers, he told me his story. He is the member of Living Way Church in Colombo, the country's capital city. At around 400 members, Living Way is a megachurch by Sri Lankan standards. This man and his family maintain membership there while he plants churches in poor urban neighborhoods. He's able to reach into communities where he wouldn't feel safe bringing his children. Every Sunday, he attends the mother church in the morning while pastoring one microchurch at 4:30 p.m. on Sundays, and another at 7 p.m. He's hardly busier than any Bible study leader in an American church. The difference is that he takes the church to unreached crannies of society.

Five Elements to this Operating System

Here are 5 takeaways from this story. They constitute a new operating system that you could use while doing business as usual with the other 99 percent of your congregation: 1. A megachurch operating as a launch platform for church multiplication. 2. A career-holding pastor who leads a church (actually two of them) as a freelance church planter. 3. Autonomous microchurches planted by "lay pastors." 4. Church planters who remain in fellowship (and tithing to) their home church. 5. Penetration of corners of society that would otherwise not interact with the gospel.

These five elements, taken together, present you with a new tool for experimenting your way into becoming a church multiplier—at limited cost of money, manpower or momentum.

Success At Home and Abroad

This strategy has multiplied more than 2,060 churches (with just under half meeting in homes). Starting with just 28 people the

group has baptized more than 22,000 people since 1983. More than 18,000 people attend their churches. Persecution restricts the churches to evangelism through discipling—they don't rely on "altar calls" or an attractional model. This is a country of persecution where both Buddhists and Hindus physically attack and persecute Christians. The group has lost people to bombs tossed into their meetings.

The dominant culture is Buddhist (Singhalese), after that come the Hindu Tamils. Finally, there is a minority of cultural Christians called Burghers, left over from days of British occupation.

The primary leader, Leslie Keegel, a Sri Lankan Burgher, who traded his Beatles haircut for a Bible back in the '70s. He has had a direct hand in 25 church plants. The church's Bible college accounts for 415 churches. The rest multiplied from the disciple-making efforts of those congregations. They seek to plant autonomous self-supporting, self-governing, and self-propagating churches.

Living Way Church is a multiplication movement, which so penetrates Sri Lanka that there are constant threats on Keegel's life. He is forced to live in a complex guarded by automatic weapons and fences with high-voltage wire that will kill an intruder.

By the way, the group has planted reproducing churches in New Zealand, the United Kingdom, Australia, Bahrain, the Emirates, India and Bangladesh. I currently work with one of their pastors, Surekha Hulugalle, in the United Kingdom he reignited an aging movement of sixteen churches, taking them to 46 autonomous churches in just six years. He moved there as an IT professional and then planted a reproducing church. The BMW guy wouldn't talk cars or business. All he wanted to do was describe how his parent church and the disciples he was making

were helping to fulfill the Great Commission. Surekha now leads a small movement in the U.K. The keys to these stories are the twin concepts of microchurch and freelance pastors.

What's impressed me the most about the guy in Sri Lanka and Surekha is that they view their careers as providers of financial capital which sponsor ministry *away from* the marketplace. This is important, for us, because most of what American churches do, off campus, is focused on the marketplace. These guys are taking new territory—we can learn from them.

Defining Microchurch

By now, you know that what I'm calling microchurch figures big in my ideas about the future. It is the backbone of the operating system I observed in Sri Lanka. I also believe that such a vehicle fits into the near future of a church multiplication movement in the United States.

A microchurch is different from a bible-study in five ways:

1. It is semi-autonomous from the platform church that gave it birth. While answering to an elder board in a sending church, microchurch elders are the “troops on the ground.” They make decisions necessary to expand the kingdom in their unique turf.
2. It responds to the “go” of the Great Commission rather than the “come” of Level 3 churches. Bible studies and marketplace missionaries both operate in close conjunction with a central church. “Come join us” is a subtle subtext to their message. The microchurch operates from an opposing paradigm—the idea is to take the gospel to people who would

not fit easily into the sending church. The motive is “go” rather than “come.”

3. It brings church into cultures where people are not likely to identify with the cultural majority. Cultural similarities are part of the glue binding any congregation. People worship and play with people much like themselves. Microchurches utilize “bridge people” who are comfortable in more than one culture to penetrate unreached people groups.
4. Its elders are endorsed by the sending church as pastors, rather than marketplace missionaries. This generates a huge motivational difference. When a group can self-identify as a church its leaders carry the weight of spiritual authority and the responsibilities attendant to it.
5. It is authorized to celebrate the sacraments and reproduce itself as its leaders see fit. More than any other distinguishing factor, handling of the sacraments denotes a spiritual reality not found in Bible studies or marketplace ministries. This may be the determining factor in turning out a movement of culture-penetrating microchurches.

CHAPTER 2

Five Benefits of Multiplication

As we continue to ask, “Why multiply?” we must move beyond imperatives to benefits. These are related to the forces pressing us to multiply, but we’d do best if we see them as opportunities to grasp rather than reactions to pressure.

1. Multiplication Expands our Reach and Go Capacity

By investing too narrowly in one place, we skip over opportunities in other locations—be it across town or halfway around the world.

The churches that I pastored in Hawaii illustrate these opportunities. We have people from other cultures who worship with us. One man, Junji Ono, who moved to Hawaii from Japan launched a string of Japanese-language churches in Hawaii, Texas and Japan, One of our local church plants planted churches

in Thailand. The church I most recently pastored is looking at mandarin speaking Chinese immigrants through the eyes of its mandarin speaking members. The goal is not to bring these people into the church but to plant a microchurch in their midst. The same goes for recent Filipino immigrants.

Recently, my friend Corey (who is my successor at Hope Chapel Honolulu) asked our congregation to lift their hands if they spoke a language other than English at home. About eight percent of the people raised their hands. Corey then explained that if we truly see ourselves as a global/local church, we should begin planting microchurches via our family connections. From there, we will find access to other nations.

While recent immigrant cultures remain under-evangelized a few individuals function as token members of churches representing the dominant culture. This can give us a false sense of well-being—we feel that we are reaching the “world at our doorstep.” But this approach falls short of real effectiveness. Equipping these “bridge people” to lead microchurches would give us increased opportunity for penetrating unique cultures right in our own backyards.

Microchurches also reach across generations. I found it easy to disciple the millennials in our church. Most are looking for understanding about finance and marital issues, this gives older people access to their lives. But beyond that, we’ve been grooming several of them to launch microchurches among their peers. Their natural craving for intimacy and their bent toward friendship circles make this a no-brainer. Microchurches eliminate much of this. It is only when a microchurch grows explosively that the congregation faces these problems. Microchurches work in Nepal

and New York. They will work where you live if you give them a shot.

PS150, planted by Randall and Annie Kalama, serves a half-dozen ethnic groups that include prostitutes and drug addicts among those they disciple. And many of these people have been redeemed and returned to society. The church mixes privileged middle-class people with the hopelessly homeless. Microchurches force people into relationships. Love, when it enters the picture, crosses all boundaries.

2. Multiplication Helps Reach the Culture

Evangelical Christians are a cultural minority. But that means there is great opportunity for disciple making, evangelism and church multiplication. Persecution in China forced the church to emulate a simpler approach that more closely approximates the book of Acts. The result was fantastic growth. We could do the same but without the persecution.

We are not persecuted in the U.S., but “Christendom” is a thing of the past. In a minority position we must rely on relationships and discipling to further the gospel. Between 2007 and 2014, the religiously unaffiliated or “nones” in the United States grew from 16 percent to 23.⁹ That’s one percent per year forsaking God. We can wring our hands over this, or we can see this as a signal that our culture is ripe for a spiritual awakening. Couple that attitude with the thought that new churches evangelize more quickly than older ones and we have a roadmap into the future.

As we’ve become a cultural minority, our mission field has actually increased. There are 224 languages represented in the L.A. County public schools.¹⁰ What a incredible opportunities we

possess! Most larger American congregations are middle-class, white or African-American.¹¹ Simultaneously, we have pockets of immigrants who are looking for friends to welcome them into our country. Microchurches could reap a huge harvest by adapting to fit the cultural expectations of these people. This invasive stance is a direct response to Jesus' words in Acts 1:8.

These opportunities to multiply churches transcend race. As much as we hate to admit it, our culture is divided along class lines much like Europe. We may not label anyone as “nobility,” but we act as if they are. The problem is that these classes don't mix as well as we wish. Middle-class churches don't do particularly well at integrating ultra-wealthy, or very poor people. To reach unique pockets of people, we must tap into their cultures through whatever relationships we have. Microchurches provide an excellent venue for multiplication among people a little unlike us.

An effective church should look like and reflect the people in the community. The typical American church-planting project brings in outsiders to plant. Then they attract a following through advertising that brings people in the front door. Most *missional* efforts target people through ministry to physical needs. Even so, the abundance of U.S. church planting remains in the middle-class. Microchurches allow for cross-pollination. I have a friend who recently retired as the president of a large bank. He could plant a microchurch behind the gates of his exclusive community. Again, the microchurch can touch a unique pocket of unreached people.

Chris Backert is the national director of Fresh Expressions US, an international movement of missionary disciples cultivating new kinds of church alongside existing congregations to more effectively engage our growing post-Christian society. In a recent press interview, Backert shares, “We're working with a church in

Reading, Pennsylvania, that has six or seven microchurches, all led by lay people. One is a microchurch of hunters, another is a gun club, one for bikers, one for artists that meets in an art studio, and one that calls itself ‘the house church for sinners.’¹²

My friend, Brian Sanders, leads a mixed bunch of microchurches, in Tampa, Florida. Their network of microchurches reaches into every corner of society. Some have grown beyond a size that would cause them to function as micro. To do this, they work with leaders that most pastors you know would reject. The thing about them that stands out is their willingness to embrace diversity within the boundaries of New Testament teaching.

3. Multiplication Carries Unique Financial Advantages

Currently, American churches spend a lot of money on church programs, short-term missions, and traditional missionaries overseas. This is fruitful, but expensive.

In the US, we spend approximately \$1.5 million for every Baptism (including buildings, programs and salaries to get them there).¹³ That translates to the cost of five 2018 Ferrari 488s, or the total cost of shelter, food, water and education for 500 refugees from ISIS living in Jordan—and that’s just the cost of a single baptism in the U.S.

Boomers and Silents provide most church income. Sixty-nine percent of all charitable donations come from people currently above the age of forty-nine.¹⁴ One study suggests that over the next three decades, church income will fall by more than 70 percent due to life expectancy of these generous donors.¹⁵ This will seriously damage our ability to sustain huge mortgages,

facilities maintenance and the staff to support the programs familiar to us today.

Decrying expenses won't solve anything. Finding a better way to steward money will. We need sustainable models if we hope to recapture the hearts and minds of America.

The strength of microchurches led by freelance pastors is that they are financially sustainable from the start. Pastors disciplined by other pastors sidestep student loans. Freelance pastors need little or no salaries. Smaller groups built around circles of mutuality rather than triangles of hierarchy will find low cost alternatives to large church campuses. And all of the above would allow church planting by capacity building, one disciple at a time, rather than the need to accumulate ever larger crowds to support the financial demands of Level 3 growth.

Level 5 multiplication requires liberated financial systems whereby growth can be scaled without a proportional demand for additional financial resources. The microchurch offers this benefit.

Vocational Costs

One of the problems facing the American church is the cost of fulltime, vocational salaries. This works well in the Level 3 church where increased attendance can fund increasing salaries.

However, this co-dependence between full-time staffing and church growth limits the church's ability to make investments in multiplication.

The less obvious problem is that of the pastor who *struggles* to remain a single-vocation pastor. That can lead to the need for money as the primary priority in the congregation. There are vocational pastors the world over, but they are not the norm. The extremely gifted leader will be paid a fulltime salary as are the

pastors in European lands where the government underwrites the church. But, across the globe most pastors serve as volunteers or with limited remuneration.

The relationship between church multiplication and evangelism in Africa, Asia and Latin America and the issue of vocational or bivocational pastorates cannot be ignored. The possibility of microchurches led by freelance pastors who maintain a separate career is enticing. I'll get into more about freelance church planters a little later.

Church Planting Costs

Even the way we plant churches is expensive. This is largely driven by the full-time salaries discussed above. The norm is three years of full-time salary and insurance for the planter plus a generous budget to underwrite operations. One denomination told me that they regularly invest \$350,000 in every church they plant (2018 costs). I met with one group that is more frugal than others. They spend just \$125,000 per church plant, launching more than two dozen churches in a decade-and-a-half. Their largest plant numbers 600 people, but the overall average attendance is 40 during the first two years. Some of their churches have reproduced, but the parent organization underwrites these projects. They do better than most, but the model will be hard to sustain if they lose the fundraising exploits of their current leader. And, if you consider bang-for-the buck, both models reap extremely expensive results.

Big, expensive churches are here to stay. We must appreciate the ministry they do and the heritage they give. But, if those, mostly Level 3, congregations could see themselves as sponsors of microchurch movements the tendency toward exponential growth would be unavoidable. The very angst we feel over the

appropriation of funds could lead to new wineskins for a new day. This is a positive that we cannot ignore.

4. Multiplication Opens Doors to Millennials

The United States is a vast mission field. Ed Stetzer estimates that there are 584 “unreached and unengaged” people groups in our country.¹⁶ The standouts are among the millennial generation. Think of them as a “millennial mission field.” Their numbers are greater than the population of many nations.

No monolith, Millennials comprise a multiplicity of unreached people groups. But some generalization will be fruitful for the sake of brevity.

The greatest growth among religious “nones” is among the millennial generation.¹⁷ They aren’t “returning to church” in early adulthood, as boomers did. Many were never there in the first place. They espouse liberal values, setting them apart from mainstream evangelical Christians. This renders them critical of large church budgets for property and program while poverty exists at home and abroad. Liberal views also cause evangelical Millennials to question the church’s lack of outreach to everyone from illegal immigrants to the LGBT community.

Millennials crave relationships and value them over expensive programming. Evangelical Millennials want a church that is a relationship rather than an event.

This generation wants ministry that looks more collegial than hierarchical. They thrive on mutuality rather than prescriptions for success. This almost demands smaller circles of people meeting for mutual support and devotion Jesus’ mission from Luke 18. Much of this should take place in gatherings around food and fellowship

(Acts 2:41-47). Much of Jesus' ministry happened over food. The most often used metaphor for the church in the New Testament is "family." Families tend to do life over food and drink.

Charlie Dunn is a seminary graduate and former campus pastor of a megachurch. Today he effectively reaches millennials. During a stint in retail, he found that inviting people to church went nowhere: "Early on, I would try to get my co-workers to come to church, because that's how I understood my role in evangelism," he says. "I was part of a great and exciting church to which I wanted my co-workers to connect."

They didn't respond. As Charlie says, "Actually they did! They responded by saying they had no interest in going to a church, no matter how good the teaching, music or programming." But... they would come to Charlie's house for a cookout, birthday party, or game. "They were willing to study the Bible for five hours at a time, grill out, have a drink, and be a family together."

When he set out to plant a church, Charlie felt unsure if he could accomplish the big splash usually associated with the project. He concluded that the "community" he built through neighborhood gatherings and daily gospel-centered relationships—the everyday stuff of life—was the seed of a church. And perhaps an even better representation of the family of God than a building or formal gathering.

In 2015, Charlie launched Hub Church in South Boston, Massachusetts. Born of deep relationships, the church currently exists as a network of three missional communities, with the intent of each person "learning to live in the family of Jesus by enjoying, embodying and extending Christ's freedom and family, on a daily basis," Charlie says. All the missional communities gather for

public services three Sundays a month while scattering to serve the community on the fourth.¹⁸

Ryan Paterson is an intentionally bivocational/freelance pastor and partner in a successful executive recruiting and coaching business in San Jose, California.¹⁹ He kicked off a string of microchurches among Millennials and Generation Z. When I met Ryan, he had launched a string of three churches and proudly proclaimed that two more would come online within the month we met.

As with others touching Millennials, Ryan points us toward close relational disciple making built around food. “I settled on gatherings around a meal, teaching as dialogue and discussion, and hospitality-based good works and mission,” he explains, “Take a moment to think of the people you have had in your home (or are friends with people in your church) that are not likely to walk in the doors of a traditional church building because of their pain, shame, and hang-ups about God, religion and church. This is an opportunity to see the gospel leap to these unreached places and for churches to form as a natural result of people coming to faith in Jesus where they are.

Consider Cornelius, Lydia, the Ethiopian eunuch, and so many others who brought their families, their households, and their nations to faith right where they were.”

For an entire generation to live outside the gospel is not new. God rescued our country through spiritual awakenings in earlier times. He is capable of overriding the culture now as He did then. He brought new life when despair was the word of the day. If we change our approach to this relationship we call church, we may well see an awakening that we cannot imagine.

This is a time for hopefulness and innovation. We can continue to blast away with our heavy and expensive productions, or we can tailor our delivery methods to the needs and desires of this generation. Smaller churches are well-positioned to meet the needs for both information and intimacy:

5. Multiplication Preserves Wineskins

We must plant churches if we expect to disciple our culture. A spiritual awakening simply cannot happen if all the fruit must find its way into old wineskins. Respectfully speaking, an old wineskin may be very spiritually alive, but it is old, by virtue of time and its cultural attachment to another day and generation.

Primary revival leadership usually emerges among frustrated people moving from the ragged edges of the church. These people collect a few followers and begin seeking God. The common ingredient for fellowship occurs when the Holy Spirit meets them in an unusual way through the outpouring of His gifts. They sense the power of God and see it as a mandate to change the church.

The group invents new ways to serve their community. The vocabulary communicates biblical truth through simpler, more up-to-date terminology. Religious formality is nearly nonexistent. The new ways are not so much tools of evangelism but implements of nurture. There is common ground among the believers. People take the Scriptures literally and cling to them in their daily life. There is often an accompanying presentation of God's power through miracles, spiritual gifts or worship experience. The new group bursts with enthusiasm while the established church enjoys business as usual. This is exactly how we got to where we are today. What I described above started back in the 1970s Jesus

Movement with churches led by natural entrepreneurs and gifted speakers. It morphed into the mega/multisite churches that guide us today. But it is a response to a different generation. We need new wineskins for a new generation.

We are not called to destroy old wineskins with new wine. Spiritual awakenings give birth to new ideas and different traditions. They engender new leadership that can upset a still functional, though set-in-its-ways church culture. Jesus never criticized old wineskins for being old. In fact, He said the old wine was valuable and that men would desire it over the new. He did clearly state that old wineskins would be broken by new wine and that the Father was faced with the need to preserve both the new wine and His older wineskins. We need new wineskins, today, more than at any time in the past few decades—and we need lots of them...

SECTION 2

WHAT MULTIPLICATION LOOKS LIKE

CHAPTER 3

Characteristics of a Multiplying Church

I was a part of the team that came up with a list of 10 characteristics of a Level 5 multiplying church. Exponential has used that list in several books, including a book Jeff Christopherson and I wrote called [*New to Five: Starting a Level Five Multiplying Church*](#). The list is a living document and still a work in progress. In conversations with Todd Wilson, co-founder of Exponential, we talked through how these ten characteristics look on the ground. As Todd and I talked we agreed that if we could reorganize the outcome of that meeting we would publish the list differently today. Here are my takeaways from that conversation.

Think of them as what we call the “1-7-10 characteristics of a Level 5 multiplying church.”

We begin with the *one primary objective* for the church and move to *seven non-negotiable pillars*. These are fundamental to our

understanding of our master and his commission to take the gospel to the ends of the earth. Without these we have no real basis for partnership in the gospel. After that we consider *ten negotiable priorities* for any ministry—these you must decide for yourself. As priorities, not pillars, they give wiggle room for you to cling to your convictions while maintaining relationships with others who view them differently.

One Disciplemaking Objective

The single overriding objective of the church is to make disciples who make disciples while planting churches that plant churches.

This is the direct result of the Great Commission as we read of it in Acts. Every pastor and church should be able to measure this to the fourth generation (2 Timothy 2:2). Scripture states that every knee shall bow, and every tongue confess that Jesus is Lord. The goal is for that to happen on our watch. This explains the admonition to multiply disciples from Jerusalem to Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth (having lived in Hawaii, I get “the ends of the earth”).

Seven *Non-negotiable* Core Pillars

While the following pillars are non-negotiable and necessary for achieving level-five disciplemaking, at the beginning, middle, and end of all these is prayer. We wrestled with an eighth pillar, “the priority of prayer”, but then we realized prayer permeates throughout the whole process. That’s why we mention it here at the beginning—to set the tone for the following seven core pillars.

1. Our Distinctive: Jesus is Lord

This is central to everything. We can “agree to disagree” over doctrine but never over the lordship of Jesus. The product of our efforts should aim to produce fully people who are fully surrendered to the Lordship of Jesus rather than cultural Christians. Our mission to make disciples who are fully surrendered to the Lordship of Jesus is what distinguishes us from all other organizations and causes.

2. Our Mission: Disciplemaking

Do you press toward making converts who must continually be fed or disciples who make Biblical disciples of others?

Reproduction is the building block of multiplication and it starts with disciples who reproduce themselves. Fail to create a culture of disciple making and you will never achieve Level 5 multiplication.

3. Our Power: The Holy Spirit

Jesus told the church at Jerusalem to wait for the power of the Holy Spirit. We will do well to adhere to his instruction. Much of what we do is driven by human invention. Someone observed that you needn't be a Christ-follower to lead a church given the present availability of technology and tools. If we intend to redeem our culture, we must first rekindle the fires of the Spirit in our own hearts and those of the people we lead.

4. Our Guide: The Scriptures

If you would change the world you must place the scripture above all other wisdom. The psalmist wrote, “Your word is a lamp to my

feet and a light to my path” (Psalm 119:105 ESV). Whenever our church practices deviate from a scriptural foundation, the tremors of the surrounding culture threaten them. Building our house on the rock of scripture is our hope.

5. Our Platform: The Church

Jesus said that he would build his church. Church involves people gathering in his name. They will focus on the apostles teaching, fellowship, eating together and prayer. They will include holy communion, generous giving and miracles in answer to prayer. If they do this well, they will enjoy favor in the surrounding community which will enable them to freely go and make disciples who learn to reverence and obey Jesus.

Such communities epitomize the essence of church. If we opt for anything else we lose something precious that was given to us by our Master. The beauty of it all is that simple, God-honoring communities are fairly easy to reproduce.

6. Our Call: Mobilizing everyday missionaries into every corner of society.

This book is an exercise in redundancy. I will keep pressing the opportunities bound up in multiplication. I’ll also press you toward taking the love of Jesus to people who don’t look and think as you do. We should not ask people to exchange their culture for ours in order to follow Jesus. That issue was settled in Acts, chapter 15. We need to mobilize ourselves around the love of Christ and take that love into the unreached corners of our society. Anything short of this is a violation of the command to make disciples of all nations (ethne, or peoples) in the Great Commission. The word ethne could apply to a bunch of surfers who hang out together

or a high society bridge club. If we would obey our Lord we must make disciples of every people group in our nation.

7. Our Accelerator: Multiplication

Addition growth is real growth. We would be in much worse shape if it weren't for the large, path-finding churches of the past three decades. However, addition growth falls short of the goal to make disciples of all people—for mundane logistical reasons. Some of our best brains bang against logistical ceilings brought on by insistent addition strategies. Worse, many of our recognized leaders are facing retirement and an ultimate graduation to heaven. Because addition is a tough row to hoe, their successors will find it difficult to fill their shoes let alone produce more addition growth.

On the other hand, multiplication is rather simple. You teach someone to do what you do then release them to get the job done as the Spirit leads. The result is accelerated evangelism. If new churches evangelize faster than established congregations, we should make more new churches at a faster rate. The math is simple, changing the operating system is not. But change it we must if we intend to leverage discipling to dominate our culture through the love of Jesus.

Ten Negotiable Core Priorities

Along with the one primary objective and seven non-negotiable pillars there are 10 priorities that acknowledge differences in church doctrine, polity and mission field (affected community). Regardless of your tribe affiliation, you need to define these 10 priorities for yourself.

A short list of the ten includes:

1. New Measures of Success (L5 vs L3)
2. Liberated Financial Systems
3. Minimal Ecclesiology
4. Level 5 Leadership within an Apostolic Atmosphere
5. Kingdom-centric/Geo-centric Focus
6. Everyone a Missionary
7. Sending Impulse
8. Easily Accessible (everyone gets to play)
9. Bias to Yes
10. Relational Affiliation to a Tribe, Family or Network of Churches

Let's stretch our thinking by expanding on these ten. As you read the next section please understand that each of these 10 negotiables requires decision-making on your part. It might be wise to read the next few pages with a journal in hand. Jot your thought as you read, then formalize them into a working document that you can use to disciple your most promising leaders.

1. New Measures of Success/Scorecards (L5 vs L3):

Do you seek to grow a single congregation or to disciple nations by multiplying disciples and churches? Do you seek to create the best possible “come and see” environments AND “go and be” environments or are you captive to the Level 3 “come and see” bias?

What gets measured gets done! If you measure conversions and baptisms, you will get them. Measure church attendance and

you will figure out how to make it grow. But you need to measure more to disciple a nation.

At Level 5 a church will measure how many people are involved in active disciple making. It will look at what proportion of the budget went into church multiplication. It will keep its members *focused* on the possibility that they could involve themselves in multiplying a new church. It will celebrate the number of churches stemming from itself and it will make heroes of the people who took new territory for the kingdom of God by planting those churches. A Level 5 church will want to know what percentage of its church plants reproduced themselves.

2. Liberated Financial Systems:

Whenever money is involved, things get sticky. This requires a redefinition of excellence away from perfection toward multiplication. If you spend all your funds perfecting a Sunday morning performance, you grow addicted to money and find it difficult to invest, significantly, in the world outside your congregation.

A multiplication movement places a higher priority on multiplication than it does on presentation. This means that you consumer Christians either mature into fully surrendered Christians or they become uncomfortable in church. One handy tool for this is a statement of mission on your church website. If you make it clear that you intend that every Christ follower learns to live life as a mission, you can begin to filter out “consumer Christians” or spectators.

By reconstituting our priorities around disciple making and church multiplication, we drastically reduced our overhead while expanding the Kingdom at a much higher rate. Remember that if

you build a beast, you must feed it. I would rather feed a menagerie outside our walls than a monster within. A liberated church can afford to invest heavily in church planting, especially when planting overseas. Or a liberated church might stick with business-as-usual while planting a movement of microchurches at almost no cost. Whatever pathway you take toward multiplication, can you liberate your finances (change your spending priorities) to the point that you could invest a tithe of your church income to church multiplication in your community, across the country and overseas?

3. Minimal Ecclesiology:

Does your church polity enable multiplication or is it a hindrance? To frame your minimal ecclesiology, you **MUST** stay true to New Testament truths while minimizing the number of man-made rules that stifle mobilization. We can't expect to deviate from Jesus' way of doing things and expect strong impact.

“What is church?” Is a microchurch a “real church?” How does the Bible functionally describe church minimums? When people are gathered together in His name, is that always a biblical church? If so, is a Super Bowl party among Christians church? I think not. The word, *ecclesia*, appears 114 times in the New Testament. Mostly it refers to the universal body of Christ—there is little theology attached to local gatherings. You would do better to define the roles of leaders, especially pastors (elders) and deacons, including deaconesses because you have scripture for these roles while there is so little scripture describing local assemblies. As you attach biblical qualifications to these roles inside your particular culture and church culture you can identify your minimum threshold for multiplying churches. The idea is to remove, or at least reduce, impediments to individuals reproducing churches.

Do the hard work to wrestle through these questions. Don't just toss out everything that stands in the way of rapid multiplication. Think this through as you don't want to lose something biblical in the name of pragmatism, but you shouldn't further mere church tradition at the expense of the Great Commission. Find balance. You don't want to stand before Jesus someday and have him say, "Why were you so legalistic and controlling?" You also don't want him to say, "Why didn't you take my words more seriously? Did you really think you could get my intended results by using human regulations?"

Keeping our ecclesiology simple is important. My friend Randall Ishida leads microchurches focused on men coming out of prison in Honolulu. Listen to how he describes his meetings: "I like self-discovery," he says. "We don't sing. No Sermon. All members participate in discussing the Bible to discover what God is saying through the Holy Spirit and His Word. We share food, and we share spiritual food. Prayer and fellowship lead to brothers caring for one another. We teach tithing but ask each member to tithe to a checking account in their own name with the understanding that the money belongs to Jesus (the pastor doesn't have access to any money).

They are to give away the money as the Spirit leads. As a freelance pastor, I have no need of money, and we don't pay building rent. Avoiding the issue of money opens the door for fellowship with people who don't trust others' motives. Lordship and obedience are key to our understanding of discipleship. We want to produce disciples who make disciples instead of making church programs."

Randall has worked through defining and contextualizing his minimum ecclesiology for the micro-churches he oversees. He is

seeking to remain true to Scripture while avoiding unnecessarily adding additional man-made requirements that can ultimately create barriers to multiplying healthy, disciple-making faith communities.

Spend the time and diligence necessary to define and take ownership for your minimum ecclesiology.

4. Level 5 Leadership within an Apostolic Atmosphere:

Discussing Ephesians 4 in the light of the modern church can incite volatile conversations. In his classic book, [*The Forgotten Ways: Reactivating Apostolic Movements*](#), Alan Hirsch summarized the gifts in that chapter as APEST or apostles, prophets, evangelists, shepherds (pastors) and teachers.

Along with Alan, many hold that these five leadership gifts are *offices* in the church and necessary to its current success. Others believe that the gifts ceased with the death of the last of Jesus' immediate disciples plus Paul (all of this begs the question about whether Barnabas, Andronicus or Junia who are called apostles in the New Testament). Another question is whether, or not, the list of gifts in Ephesians 4 is comprehensive or simply mentioned as means toward a goal of maturing the body of Christ. These are open questions—with answers open to negotiation.

Whatever your view, the *functions* mentioned in the list are more important than the forms. I'm uncomfortable with people describing me as a pastor if I must conform to a definition. First, I am not as much a shepherd as I am a teacher. I have an apostolic bent but won't answer to the title. My point is that we can put aside our definitions and forms in favor of an environment that seeks a well-rounded ministry that reflects the spirit of this important passage.

My friend, Rob Flaherty in Kobe, Japan, pastors one of the largest (if not *the* largest) congregation in the city. He functions apostolically by capitalizing on the popularity of his internet sermons to launch churches made up of online viewers. He hosts meetings in cities across Japan where he has a large following. He gathers viewers together to form microchurches. Nearly every month Rob travels to a new location to launch a microchurch. He brings along one member of his church as a coach to help each new microchurch until a pastor emerges among the locals. Is he an apostle, or does he simply function apostolically? You decide.

Leonard Lawyer disciplined a friend into a relationship with Jesus. The guy lives on Molokai, an airplane trip away from Leonard in Honolulu. When that man began discipling neighbors, they tried a couple of churches but didn't fit. We decided to fly Leonard to Molokai, monthly. His task is to oversee and disciple the new believer who evangelized and now leads a small congregation of people he brought to Christ. Leonard functions much as Paul did in his relationship with a new church in a "frontier mission." Is Leonard an apostle, or a Christ-follower functioning apostolically? What about the guy in Molokai? How would you describe him? What about me as a sponsor of both Rob in Kobe and Leonard on his trips to Molokai?

Level 5 multiplication can only happen in an apostolic atmosphere. This is why minimum ecclesiology is so important. How you answer the questions I've asked in this section will affect your future Great Commission success. By the way, both Rob Flaherty and Leonard Lawyer operate from churches with liberated finances?

5. Kingdom-centric/ Geo-centric Focus:

Do you pastor a church or a geographic area? Do you disciple others with a goal of releasing them into the larger kingdom of God to carry the fullness of Jesus into every corner of the geographic area you pastor? We can disciple nations if we organize toward that goal. This implies that leaders serve as hero-making multipliers. These leaders are willing to sacrifice what they might enjoy at home for what they can produce in other places and cultures. A posture of giving rather than holding.

If you view the Great Commission as a call to disciple entire nations, you'll never be satisfied just leading a single church—large or small. Instead, you'll seek to discern whatever part of the world is your parish and then attempt to saturate it with the gospel. When I lived in Southern California, we saw California beach towns as our unique cultural ballpark. When we moved to Hawaii, we understood the whole state was our primary mission field. Our goal was one percent of the population in churches we planted or helped plant in 10 years. It took 11 years but caused a rise of apostolic leaders (outside our own circles) that moved the needle from four percent in 1983 to 62 percent declaring their faith in Christ by 2006. The same survey had 34 percent of people stating that they had been in church during the past seven days.²⁰

Japan was next and finally, whatever doors the Lord opened elsewhere. The goal was never to build either a movement or an organization—we always sought to expand the Kingdom through a “disciple and release” approach to ministry and church multiplication.

6. Everyone a Missionary:

Does the “priesthood of all believers” work in shoe-leather for you? Your members will seize unexpected opportunities if you train them to.

Statistics show that the church in the U.S. is not penetrating into every crack and cranny of society. Our answer is in part to mobilize people to “go and be” the church into their unique mission field in society rather than simply trying to attract people to “come and see.” The “footprint” or “shadow” of the church’s impact is greatly increased when we mobilize an army of everyday missionaries.

The challenge is that the prevailing paradigm in the Level 3 operating system is one of “we can do it, you can help.” The Level 3 church is possibly the best mobilizer of volunteers in the world (possibly the history of the world). Unfortunately, we mobilize volunteers primarily to run the internal operations of the church and to build our capacity for more growth. Imagine the impact of shifting our approach to “you can do it, how can we help!” What if the church became a mobilizing and launching platform for followers of Jesus to discover and engage and catalyze their unique personal calling! What if we mobilized missionaries into the mission fields represented by everyday life? BTW, I see everyday missionaries ministering in their workplace, neighborhood or serving in a soup kitchen as distinct from people operating microchurches. Everyone is a Matthew 28 missionary, not everyone functions as a pastor.

The secret of Hope Chapel as a movement has been the idea that every member is on a mission. We focus on the priesthood of all believers as pragmatic rather than symbolic. Each member of the body of Christ has a function. All are called as fishers of

men, and all are called to make disciples capable of making other disciples. The most important task of church leadership is to help these folks find their way into ministry through intentional disciple-making systems. Our network of home groups is a starting place. Often, these people band together to join a single member in some outreach venture. This, then, inspires us to do more which, in turn, helps people find their way into some unique ministry.

7. Sending Impulse:

Can you see the value in lining up with Jesus in Acts 1:8? Are you a sender or an accumulator?

The question is never: “Are you called to ministry?” but rather, “What ministry does God have for you?” Helping people discern this leads to an outward mentality. Again, people will come to you with farfetched ideas. Learn that ministry is about what happens “out there,” rather than fitting more bodies into your church machine.

Last summer I spent a week, training leaders in a Level 4 reproducing church in Russia. The leader had recently left a successful church (and network) in a small city to start anew in the former Russian capital of St. Petersburg. He’s operating with more faith than money. In spite of the difficulties, he launched two new churches in just two years from a congregation numbering fewer than 100 on a weekend. The church he pastors is young, poor, and filled with possibilities.

Their biggest struggle is to grow fast enough for their finances to catch up to their ability to multiply ministry. We hit a speed bump late in the meetings. Confusion arose over one man, Dmitri, potentially planting a microchurch among recent Jews immigrating

from Muslim lands. To the pastor, the idea of one of his mature leaders launching small churches seemed like a threat, “Why not just invite them to come to our service? Why deny them the joy we have in our worship and teaching?” The answer: These folks speak broken English and could not fit into the Russian language congregation.

Once he grasped the idea that a leader might *remain* in the mother church while planting a microchurch as a freelance pastor, everything fell into place.

Ten hours after our discussion, one immigrant family contacted Dmitri to ask if he could hold “church” for them and a few of their friends who wanted to know about Jesus. At the end of the day, this pastor was excited to see that he could extend the boundaries of his ministry with a new tool that would not demand the financial resources he puts into ordinary church plants.

The Russian pastor already has a spending impulse, but financial considerations along with performance driven church meetings inhibited it. Once freed from those restraints he now launches churches at a faster rate. Ten months later, Dmitri has replaced himself as pastor of that microchurch and is moving to Sochi with a plan to plant 12 microchurches in villages surrounding that city. We must guard our own sending impulses. If you are reading this book it underscores the sending impulse within you. The key is to root out any obstacles to that impulse. Lives depend on it.

8. Easily Accessible (everyone gets to play):

What training and rules must a person negotiate before joining your ministry team? The fewer you have, the more likely you are to multiply.

Everybody plays. Make it easy for people to gain access to ministry. Rereading Matthew 28 (verse 17) tells us that some of those commissioned still doubted the resurrection. This is interesting. Jesus wasn't bothered by the contradictions common to a movement. Some people go off half-cocked but if you eliminate them, you tend to stomp out the tender seedlings of good grass (Matt. 13:24-30). If you want to lead a Level 5 movement, you must get used to an inclusive messiness, which can be as simple as inviting unskilled people to join a ministry team. For example, we allow musicians to hone their skills while serving on our worship teams—we just don't plug them in until they reach a certain Level of musical competence.

Our churches must allow every member to play a role in ministry. Early on, we began breaking every job description into four pieces. We'd arrange them hierarchically by order of difficulty. The easiest chunk became an entry point for new believers to enter ministry.

One metaphor that sticks with me is the idea that you would feed an army of rabbits rather than elephants because they multiply so rapidly. When it comes to disciple-making ability, we need thousands of rabbits reproducing all over the place. Instead, we see rabbits trying to morph into elephants—which never works!

9. Bias to Yes:

Do you find it easier to give permission than to withhold it? Mobilizing the priesthood of all Believers requires that we move from “we can do it, you can help” to “you can do it, how can we help?” This requires letting go of some control and allowing new ideas which are often messy and risky.

Do frontline people have the ability to change protocol to meet needs or seize rising opportunities? Christ followers run everything from households to small businesses to huge construction projects, yet some pastors want to retrain them in basic skills before allowing them to participate. In churches I've pastored, some of our most productive ministries came through people whose "crackpot schemes" would only get them into trouble—according to the naysaying voice in my head. It often took discipline to say, "Yes, you can; how can I help?" However, it usually paid off.

The interesting thing about saying, "yes," was how often the next 14 days would introduce me to someone with a similar idea. I became an effective networker through granting permission. The Jerusalem church did well in sending Peter and John to help Philip when he got in over his head. They did even better when they endorsed the goings-on in Antioch after sending Barnabas to explore the new (and radically different church). A bias to yes, usually involves building a support net of relationships around the new idea.

Wendell Elento left our staff to "pastor" a large company after one employee murdered five others. When he told me that God was calling him away from our team I informed him that he was mistaken (bias to "no"). He proved me wrong. He began by arriving early to work on Thursdays, softly singing worship songs in the room where the evil happened. Word got around. People began asking for prayer. Today he leads three small churches on separate days of the week. Two congregations meet in a restaurant. The other gathers in a bar. Most of the people are single parents who find it difficult to get to church on the weekend. The word, yes, unleashes multiplication while a negative answer prevents it.

10. Relational Affiliation to a Tribe, Family or Network of Churches:

Are you connected with others who see beyond the local church into the unreached people groups in your community? You need likeminded peers.

We can't live fully without human relationships. Most multiplication movements are birthed inside an existing denomination or network much like Microsoft and Apple; both incubated in the lap of IBM. A multiplication movement generates a tribe by maintaining contact with churches born of it. How you construct this is vital to your success.

Besides your original tribe, you need to connect with likeminded peers who can help feed your fire and pick you up after a mishap. You'll often discover these relationships through people you meet at events like the Exponential conferences.

Finally, you should build a tribe among those you commission to multiply churches. Over my adult life, a host of churches have come from a single congregation my wife and I planted in 1971. We have no formal organization but do maintain a tribal relationship. Through written materials, email and my personal website, we've maintained a "Hope Chapel identity," (though most of our churches don't use the Hope Chapel name). Larger training venues have helped, but sometimes we felt we needed to cede that territory to the denomination that birthed me. My point, though, is that you must build tribal relationships or face a breakdown in your future and the futures of the pastors you commission.

CHAPTER 4

Rapid Multiplication Drivers

Our bodies convert food, water and oxygen into fuel for growth and health. The original Jesus movement had fuel in the lives of dedicated people who died to themselves (often physically) for the cause of filling the earth with the knowledge of the Lord. They became fuel to the Body of Christ.

Let's look at six primary fuel sources that could potentially make the unsatisfied Great Commission a reality during the next hundred years. Think of these as forces which drive any church multiplication movement.

1. A Visionary Sponsor

Management guru Peter Drucker [once observed](#), “Whenever anything is being accomplished, it is being done, I have learned, by

a monomaniac with a mission.” Be it Amazon CEO Jeff Bezos, McDonald’s Ray Kroc or inventor Thomas Edison, “narrow-minded” people lead the rest of us into a better future. To turn the flow of American culture back toward Christ, we need extremely focused individuals who can see that adding to the size of their churches has more value if addition results in multiplication. These are people who will build capacity to multiply rather than settling for geocentric addition. Addition should result in a greater capacity for multiplication. My question to you is, “Could you become such a monomaniac?”

2. The Backing of a Healthy Church

Most growing churches give substantial amounts of money to overseas missions. Many sponsor annual mission trips for church members while some liberally fund missionaries on other continents. However, most of the tangible resources in American churches go toward maintaining status quo. Status quo may include addition growth, but it’s still an exercise in more of the same. A church that achieves Level 5 multiplication will reallocate resources to mission rather than maintenance. If you don’t already know, the Great Commission is the mission.

One of my friends, Sundar Thapa, pastors a very large church in Kathmandu. He disciples leaders who disciple others who disciple people to Christ. This church cannot safely advertise themselves in the way Americans do—people would be killed if they did. Sundar is a freelance apostle. A successful land developer, he planted a church that grew to nearly 1,000 people (a megachurch in Nepal). The congregation has launched more than 160 others. They fund their planters by setting them up in small

businesses. Sundar loans microchurch planters money to start a small business, and they repay loans, interest-free, over a period of 10 years (you can pay off the loan for a dozen goats in 10 years at \$1.50 per month).

While it is easy to admire the creativity of the model, the bigger lesson is that Sundar is an apostolic thinker. He is the primary driver of this movement. Had he fallen into an addition-centric model of church, thousands of people would not be headed for heaven. The church multiplies because Sundar chose that it should. What will you choose? It takes a Level 5 thinker to drive a Level 5 church multiplication movement.

3. Microchurch as a Startup Tool

The idea of microchurch is not an end in itself. It is a tool for rapid multiplication of disciples and churches. The ideal would be for a freelance microchurch pastor to reproduce themselves multiple times with each new pastor doing the same. However, some will grow to macro status and may never reproduce. The power in this concept is that it offers a low-risk opportunity for the pastor of an existing church to launch a few disciples into a church planting experiment.

Because a freelance pastor maintains their career there is limited financial risk to both the sending church and the new pastor.

A microchurch is more than a Bible study. Bible studies come and go. As soon as you identify a group as a church, things change—some abandon you; the rest get serious. Simply using the word, “church” changes the nature of the thing from something

temporary to an enduring relationship. Add in the concept of tithing, and people either climb onboard or they get out.

A Bible study involves content, community and prayer. A microchurch adds disciple making with a goal toward a larger mission, including multiplying the church. It requires members ministering to each other. And there must be a worship aspect to it. Because they may meet in very public venues, some microchurches don't sing, limiting their worship to testimonies, etc. Others see more value in learning by self-discovery than a sermon. In this setup each member pores over a mutually agreed on scripture, then brings their insights to share with the group.

Ryan Paterson puts it this way, “Largely, I was looking for a combination of discipleship as spiritual formation and obedience; the priesthood of all believers; clear everyday mission and evangelism; and more faithful financial stewardship that would be compelling to post-Christian millennials. While this is what I was looking for, I also found that for the sake of my own soul these smaller communities empowered me to avoid the cult of self, tied to performance driven church. I wanted to cover a more relational identify in Christ not tied to my stature in Christendom. Microchurches also just started happening around a ministry to students in downtown San Jose as we began to think this way.”

A microchurch is a congregation planted by a leader who does not aspire to a full-time salary. The church intentionally starts small. With limited overhead, a microchurch can multiply rapidly because it requires no money to do so, or it can grow to something larger, bringing both addition and multiplication to the table.

I believe microchurches represent the next (and absolutely necessary) step in churches' influence on American culture.

4. An Army of Freelance Pastors

We need to take a closer look at the concept of freelance, pastors. Currently, the bivocational paradigm is somewhat distasteful. After all, we invest time, money and life itself in educating ourselves toward what we hope is full-time vocational ministry. As time passes, we discover that they can't lead a congregation large enough to sustain their family (many Level 1 churches and pastors fall into this category). The choices are simple: 1. Resign from the church to take a better job. 2. Take a second job to supplement your income.

Because our current system demands that the best years of a person's life get spent in seminary, most pastors are untrained for any other profession. Some make it as mortgage brokers or real estate agents while pastoring bivocationally. However, the majority of bivocational pastors struggle in menial jobs that pay little and satisfy less.

While necessity drives most bivocational pastors to take on a job to support their ministry role, the freelancer does it by choice. This person sees their career as their mission field. The freelancer brings financial capital to the Great Commission, as does the bivocational pastor. The difference being that the freelance pastor continues in their career as a means to expand the kingdom while the bivocational person is mostly focused on survival. The freelance pastor sees a synergy and opportunity in their paid vocation that propels them and allows them to be more creative and innovative in their approaches.

If we were to adopt a freelance model, a young person would be encouraged to fulfill God's calling by completing an education that would allow them to follow John Wesley's admonition to

“Earn all you can. Save all you can. Give all you can.” They would have less chance of living near the poverty line and more chance of discipling people they met in the marketplace than do many vocational pastors. And, unlike many bivocational pastors, they would be equipped with marketable skills during their college years. There are vast differences between the experiences of vocational, bivocational and freelance pastors.

Jeph Chavez planted a Hope Chapel in Lewiston, Idaho several years ago. Beginning as a microchurch they multiplied two other congregations within a year and grew to about 150 people at the same time. We helped fund their move, and they chose the freelance route.

Jeph launched a landscaping business in partnership with an existing building contractor. His wife also began practice as a physical therapist. “We recognized that by owning our own businesses, we had more flexibility to do ministry or make appointments to meet with people. We eventually gave away the landscaping business and still operate our therapy business today.” He adds, “Choosing the freelance route was the most natural way to meet new people and get a pulse on the community. It also underscored a value that we wanted to emphasize, and that was about getting people to see the church differently. We wanted them to see that the “senior pastor” wasn’t separated or some lofty individual just needing your time and money but was an individual the Lord had transformed and was now serving Him through love and obedience.”

Let’s look to scripture as a way to better understand the difference between freelance and bivocational ministry...

Making Tents in Corinth

We often think of Paul as a tentmaker or bivocational leader. That source of income appears to have been a fallback when he lacked funds. Scripture paints a different picture of Aquila and Priscilla and their ministry. They were tentmakers who planted ministry in Corinth before Paul arrived (Acts 18:1-3). They did more of the same in Ephesus (Acts 18:18-26) and Rome (Romans 16:3).

Aquila and Priscilla seemed to have embraced tent making as their *primary* funding source, even after engaging in ministry. They planted from their career. Aquila was a career entrepreneur doing ministry on a freelance basis. Paul was a ministry guy serving bivocationally, in our current understanding of the concept. There is a difference in the motivation and the need for funding. Aquila lived with liberated finances. Paul did not.

America's Freelance Explosion

It was at a recent Exponential event that my friend, Dave Rhodes, pointed out the tidal wave of freelance energy in America. This is an important distinction in the twenty-first century. And it's a vast event, touching nearly every area of work and business: "Employment experts routinely cite the increasing number of everyone from lawyers to technological whizzes who work as freelancers, permalancers and small-time entrepreneurs as one of the fastest growing segments of our economy."²¹

A group called Freelance Union spells out that more than 53 million Americans work as freelancers. That's 34 percent of the population. Freelancers total more than the combined populations of 25 states: Alaska, Arkansas, Connecticut, Delaware, Hawaii, Idaho, Iowa, Kansas, Kentucky, Maine, Mississippi, Montana,

Nebraska, Nevada, New Hampshire, New Mexico, North Dakota, Oklahoma, Oregon, Rhode Island, South Dakota, Utah, Vermont, West Virginia and Wyoming. More people work freelance in America than the number of voters who supported either Ronald Reagan or Bill Clinton.²² *Fast Company Magazine* projects that by 2020, more than 40 percent of the American workforce, or 60 million people, will be independent workers or freelancers.²³

There are so many people operating as freelancers that the culture spawned a new slang term, “side hustle.” I don’t know what you think about pastoring as a “hustle.” But if it works, use it.

This gets better when considering reaching millennials and Gen Z with the gospel. A higher percentage of millennials do freelance work (43 percent versus 34 percent of the general populace). And *Forbes Magazine* found that 63 percent of Gen Z intend to work as freelancers throughout their careers.²⁴ Churches should hop on the freelance express—the plane is about to take off. Question: Will you be on board when it does?

5. Persons of Peace

Evangelism is often a family affair. Wherever we go with the gospel, Jesus tells us we’re supposed to connect with a “person of peace” (Luke 10:6). Through this person, we’ll reach their tribe. As we bond to this single individual, we find our way into their tribe. This reflects the New Testament idea represented in Peter touching the “oikos,” or, household, of Cornelius (Acts 10:1- 48). Cornelius was the person of peace as was Lydia in Philippi (Acts 16:14, 40) or Crispus in Corinth (Acts 18:8).

Each of the examples I reference in this book began with such a person. Randall Ishida started with the suicidal man he met in the gym.

In the last chapter you met Wendell Elento who resigned from a large church staff to “pastor” a company where five employees had been murdered. The person of peace, in this instance, was the woman who caught him and demanded to know what he was doing.

In his words he was “singing worship songs to irritate the demons” that he felt occupied that room. This lady was the one supervisor whom most employees feared. She was also a Buddhist who believed in demons. When he fearfully confessed his plan, she began to weep. She asked him to sing to an empty room on a weekly basis. Word got around. People would stop to ask for prayer. Eventually, this turned into a microchurch on the premises. They multiplied from there. The important lesson here is that of Wendell’s relationship with this woman. They became family in the sense of a strong relationship. She was the gateway into the lives of others. Without their relationship the project would have stopped cold.

In the context of Jesus sending his disciples, the person of peace was that individual in a community who the disciples found receptive to the gospel. In the story about the Russian man reaching out to Jewish immigrants from Turkey the family that invited him to plant a microchurch were not believers but expressed interest in knowing Jesus. A clue to a would-be microchurch planter is their connection to such people. Who in your church has contact with people who wouldn’t feel comfortable in your weekend gatherings? These are the potential microchurch planters among us.

6. Perseverance

If there is any “secret sauce” in the multiplication process it is perseverance. Whatever success I have known in church multiplication is simply the result of relentless pursuit of the Great Commission via disciplemaking that leads to equipping church planters from within the local church.

Truth is, most of our church plants do not reproduce, many do so only once or twice. Most of the expansion came from the rare apostolic individual who determined to do what we have done to the fourth generation. In other words, we could have grown discouraged and given up when things didn’t follow the recipe. But, we just kept keeping on until the numbers of churches added grew and the rare multipliers showed up. Our secret is found in the old Living Bible translation of Proverbs 21:5, “Steady plodding brings prosperity; hasty speculation brings poverty.” I see addition growth as hasty while multiplication requires mundane, relentless disciplemaking.

Addition can be splashy while multiplication often goes unnoticed. The results show up over decades, not years.

I’m hoping the church of the future is fueled by these six elements. Let’s take a look at what it might look like in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 5

A Future Expression of Church

The next couple of decades will bring a tsunami of change to the American church. As baby boomers pass from the scene, finances will tighten making it more difficult for churches to own large campuses or manage expensive programs. A left-leaning political climate will pass laws rendering it more difficult for us to do business as usual. We've already seen local zoning laws impede the development of properties, future changes in tax laws and the codification of "politically correct" speech will affect the way we present our message. In short, change is upon us whether we prepare for it or not. Prepare we must! The good news is that the Jesus-driven church is up to the task.

A Lower Profile

The church of the future will adopt a lower profile in two ways. First, the cost of church as we've known it will require a less-expensive and more relational approach to meetings. Consumer-oriented Christianity will become more difficult. This is actually a good thing as it appeals to Millennials and "Generation Z" which is already in its teen years. The second reason for a lower profile is the antipathy of the larger culture toward Christ-followers. We will be forced to make disciples outside the church as an invitation to attend services is met with rising hostility. Today many companies hold policies prohibiting the discussion of religion in the workplace. Such attitudes will demand that we build friendships before sharing faith or inviting someone to attend a church meeting. Our world will look more like that experienced by first-century Christ followers or believers in nations where Christianity has long been a minority faith. Any longing for a sense of Christendom will be only a false hope.

Boutique vs Franchise

Leaders resolving to redirect toward Level 5 multiplication will need to think about the difference between a network and a movement. This is a difference between a well-oiled franchise at Level 4 and a messy movement at Level 5. Make no mistake, the franchise offers an easier path than the boutique approach. However, boutique churches can serve in places where "homogenized" franchises cannot.

If you aim for Level 5, you abandon branding and control for penetration into the cracks and crannies of society. There is no single template for every church plant. The Great Commission

calls for measurement, and you're in a numbers game. If you begin to count congregations, your ultimate numbers skyrocket from thousands to hundreds of thousands, even millions, if you choose the looser, value-driven multiplication Level 5 model. If you franchise, at Level 4, you'll still be more productive than if you choose Level 3 addition, but not as fruitful as if you pick a Level 5 boutique model.

Franchise

Twelve years after we planted the first church, my family and a team of 26 others moved to Oahu to plant a bunch of churches. Until the move, we operated as a franchise—one central unit training and governing the others. Cloning wasn't the focus, but centralization was. The church I pastored reproduced successfully. We were a strong Level 4 congregation. I fell into Level 4 leadership because everything centered on me. We operated in an open-handed manner, but I was still the lid holding things down.

We weren't using the terminology at the time, but we would have described ourselves as a Level 5 congregation producing unique “boutique” church plants. We were, however, a Level 4 church operating a network as a franchise system. Every church plant looked like us. We added capacity by adding churches. While at Level 5 you multiply churches thereby multiplying capacity to multiply further. The fear of losing control two generations out causes some leaders to stop at Level 4—they build a franchise, or network. Good, but not optimum.

Boutique

Upon relocating to Hawaii, our team felt that God called us to bring one percent of the state population into churches we started,

or helped to start, within 10 years. That forced us to think in Level 5 terms. We had to reproduce pastors who would reproduce pastors and churches. We went from reproduction to multiplication on our first Sunday via the simple announcement of our goal and the necessary logistics that came with it...

Making disciples who made disciples who made disciples and multiplying pastors who multiplied pastors who multiplied pastors were necessary to evangelizing 10,000 people in 10 years. The unique geography and high land costs in Hawaii held us back from thinking of big churches. When we described our vision, we told people, “Imagine planting just 100 churches of 100 people.” Then we informed our audience (72 people assembled on a beach without a permit) that some of them would become pastors who would disciple other pastors, or we would fail.

A series of accidents, some geographic and some denominational, kept us from retaining enough control to brand ourselves or operate as a franchise (remember, we start churches in other people’s denominations). Control is the defining difference between a franchise and a multiplicity of boutique operations.

We transformed into a Level 5 movement of boutique multiplying congregations, almost without realizing it. Looking back through the lens of Exponential’s [*Becoming a Level Five Multiplying Church*](#) has helped us understand the dynamics of our own history. Crossing oceans is great, but you need to allow cultural freedom at home to succeed. We would never have reached our goal at Level 4, but Level 5 made it a near no-brainer. Those were the days before email, so difficult communication was a problem (blessing). Long story short, what I would have controlled as a franchise grew beyond me. I had to release the

reins to reach not only Hawaii, but also into (mostly freelance missionaries) Japan, the U.S. mainland and several places in Asia.

Multiplication with minimal control systems produces more, though seldom uniform, results. Think of a photocopy machine. But, consider making copies of copies for several generations. The copies become fuzzy images of the original. At this point, you've already noticed that doctrine can become fuzzy if you multiply. However, if you believe in the power of the Word and the Spirit, you can entrust this to God as Paul did when he addressed the church at Rome long before he met them, "I myself am convinced, my brothers, that you yourselves are full of goodness, complete in knowledge and competent to instruct one another" (Romans 15:14 NIV).

We sport one string of disciple-making disciples that runs at least nine levels deep. I had close contact with the first two pastors, met numbers five, six and seven years later (I only remember one name) and will meet the others when we get to Heaven. On a recent teaching trip to the United Kingdom, I bumped into a church planter who launched more than 300 churches in Mozambique. He came from Hope Chapel Cary, North Carolina. Until then, I had only heard his story. It was a joy to meet someone in the fourth generation in a chain of disciple making—I discipled a guy who discipled a guy who discipled this man. The chain has even more links in Mozambique.

The beauty of this is that the Kingdom of God grows without my permission. There are good reasons for building franchising networks, but a fluid movement will get into places you might otherwise overlook. This is another reason to move toward a microchurch planted and pastored by lay-trained, single-salary, freelance individuals.

Immediate Sustainability

Call me a pipe dreamer (because only pipe dreams open new territory). If churches could reposition themselves as entry platforms for church multiplication the possibilities are endless. Vast potential awaits at the intersection of single-salary freelance pastors and microchurch movements.

Microchurches are immediately sustainable. The combination of a locally disciplined pastor, no rent, and a salary from outside the church combine for sustainability. They also cost the parent church very little. The planting pastor and family can remain part of the multiplying congregation if we use the Sri Lankan model that I referenced earlier. The launching congregation won't even lose the tithes from that family because microchurch requires no money.

Microchurches eliminate the three primary drivers behind our current “high cost per baptism”: formal theological education; buildings; and staff salaries. Take these out of the equation, and Level 5 church multiplication is a no-brainer. A Level 3 church with huge operational costs could experiment with microchurch without jeopardizing its budget. A small congregation can obviously do this when you consider that 20 percent of all conventional church plants get launched by churches numbering fewer than 100 members.

What is necessary is someone with a full understanding of the New Testament to set off a disciple-making chain that results in every church member becoming a potential church planter. Most will never plant a church, but this paradigm lifts every member of Christ's body to a higher level of productivity.

Randy Ishida observes, “With small churches struggling to keep finances straight, it seems logical not to be a burden and

expect the church to support pastors. Freelance pastors also live in the ‘real world.’ Having a full-time job outside the church gives the pastor opportunity to disciple unbelievers.”

I think of my friend, Wayne Ching. He leads an independent microchurch that came from Hope Chapel Kaneohe Bay via one of our church plants. Wayne earns his living as an engineer. The church he pastors emphasizes tithing. However, no one brings their tithe to the church. Members set aside 10 percent of their income to give to people in need or outside ministries. Each member functions as a tiny mission agency.

Ching brings an interesting thought to the table about salaried pastors; he doesn’t take a salary. In fact, though he is a successful microchurch pastor, he sees himself as a career businessman: “I never considered myself a pastor, even part time,” he says. He leads the church in obedience to Christ. That is his primary reward and calling.

Ching is frustrated that the church has never reproduced. But at least he’s frustrated by that— such frustration is often a down payment towards eventual multiplication. Meanwhile, he’s happy about the climate inside their group. Describing microchurch potential, he says, “Your people will grow by leaps and bounds. They will understand and embrace the line ‘we are the church’ better than any sermon could convey. They will take responsibility for feeding themselves spiritually, as you would expect any child would do with food, after the age of four. The statement ‘I wasn’t being fed’ will sound absurd. We are in a culture where the consumeristic expectation from church is to ‘feed me,’ ‘entertain me,’ and ‘meet my needs.’ While these can happen in a microchurch, people realize that what they bring to the spiritual potluck is what’s served.”

Contrast this to the prevailing model for planting mid-size churches (the one I've used throughout my life). Planting teams include a significant portion of our membership (between five and 20 percent). We lose leaders, money and size whenever we plant a church. We underwrite the projects financially. This is effective but expensive. Enthusiasm over the plant usually restores the losses very quickly. But, a congregation reproducing a church for the first time would understandably shy away from these expenses.

CHAPTER 6

Important Examples

God intended that the New Testament Church would be an archetype, or benchmark, for all that followed. American Church culture seems to assume that the New Testament model is primitive and in need of improvement.

Let's look at several facets of church in the New Testament. This cannot begin with the book of Acts, it must start with the ministry of Jesus and its outfall in the communities where he performed miracles and preached. After that we'll take a brief look at the church in China. It is growing too fast to ignore, especially since most of the growth took place under a persecuting regime that parallels the early decades of Christianity.

If you view the New Testament church as primitive, then anything you do to change it is an "improvement." If it's a prototype, however, you work hard to preserve the essence of what Scripture records. Technology may change; the basic approach to making disciples and reproducing churches will not.

But within the scope of the New Testament, there are several examples that give insight to defining what we call, “church” in ways that differ from our current, very Western traditions. Let’s think about some New Testament examples and then compare them to several untraditional churches I know about.

New Testament Insights

Before pursuing any model, or new tool, get in the habit of asking yourself, “What part of the Great Commission is my personal assignment?” Then follow it up with, “What would a biblical approach to my assignment look like?” Finally, ask, “How can I approximate Scripture in my circumstances?”

I always say that copying others will burn you out. Wrestling with God through Scripture will build you up.

The church in Jerusalem looks like a multisite operation that utilized homes to accommodate its people (Acts 2:41-47). The Apostle Paul surely planted microchurches (Acts 13-28). I think this is the reason that the Holy Spirit dedicated so much of Acts to Paul’s travels. Let’s look at a sampling of thought starters...

The All-Important Numbers

Beginning with Jesus, we see the importance of a primary leader discipling others in radiating circles. Peter, James and John were the big three in Jesus’ ministry. After that, the nine other disciples had a place at the table (you could fantasize that the three closest to Jesus related personally to three others in this circle). Beyond that, Jesus “planted” a church of 120 people in Jerusalem. That’s the number of people that assembled for prayer in Acts 1.

The Crowd at the Well

Did you ever wonder what became of the crowd the woman at the well introduced to Jesus? It's hard to imagine that the Spirit of the Lord would have abandoned them. What form do you think their faith community took after Jesus moved down the road? It's fairly safe to assume that they would have modeled after a synagogue since they had Hebrew roots mixed with their paganism. That model included a career-supported leader with a small congregation.

Accidental Missionaries

Saul of Tarsus kicked off the first missionary movement with his persecution of the Church recorded in Acts 7 and 8. Those whom he scattered took the gospel to Samaria (and Ethiopia), Phoenicia, Cyprus, Cyrene and Antioch. While the church in Antioch appears to have grown to a significant size, there's little mention of the others. This leads me to conclude that Antioch invested in multiplication while the others did not.

The Synagogue as a Model

From what we know of early Judaism, the synagogue leader supported himself by labor aside from ministry. This would have been true of the "house church" leaders in Acts 2. It would also be an example for the hastily appointed elders in churches from Lystra to Iconium to Antioch (Acts 14:19-23). I thrill to read how Paul returned from near death to sneak into towns where he appointed elders from among his disciples. He could have known these people for only a short time. Yet he and Barnabas were able

to commit them to the Holy Spirit, “in whom they had put their trust” (Acts 14:23).

China and the Little Flock Movement

We can't help but reference China when assessing the strength of microchurches. A million Christians (less than 3/100th percent of 547,804,000 people) went underground when the Communist Party came to power in 1948. Watchman Nee's Little Flock Movement had set the stage for a switch to microchurches. These secret Christians multiplied to around 163 million believers today²⁵ which projects to 20 percent of the population by 2030.²⁶ Ding Guangxun, a Communist Party member and controversial leader of the government-controlled Three Self Patriotic Churches attributed Chinese church growth to the fact that persecution had forced Christians to hold church in homes instead of assembling in large church buildings.²⁷

On one of my trips to Russia, a gathering of pastors discussed the role the Chinese government played in forcing the Church underground, which led to such rapid multiplication of disciples, pastors and house churches. The discussion strayed to the possibility of a movement of microchurches when one pastor challenged everyone with a question: “If Communism forced the spread of Christianity in China, why didn't the same type of repression spawn a similar movement in Russia?” Everyone sat in stunned silence. A common confidence in the relationship between persecution, the blood of martyrs, and the growth of the church seemed to shatter over a single question. Then someone spoke up, “It was Watchman Nee and the Little Flock Movement that

made the difference.” For several years before the Maoists gained control, Nee promoted microchurches.

Closer to Home

All of this is just theory unless it works in actuality. Check out some of these real-life examples of people who took freelance ministry to heart:

A Medical Doctor

My friend Tom McCarthy was a physician who planted a microchurch in his home. As the congregation grew, they rented various facilities and hired support staff. Growth induced the need for more money. Tom put in less than eight hours a week while the staff carried most of the load. He took no salary. The treadmill began moving. The church finally outgrew him. He chose medicine over pastoring. They hired a new pastor, and Hope Chapel Santa Rosa is healthy today. The church continues to multiply new congregations in California and in Fiji. However, money became a sustainability issue as soon as the church increased from micro- to mid-size.

Evangelizing LDS in Utah

Matthew Anderson is a freelance disciple maker planting microchurches in Utah. Matthew runs a website design company; his wife is a registered nurse. The Andersons have no thoughts of forsaking their careers for vocational ministry. In fact, their careers enhance their credibility among those they hope to disciple. They chose the freelance route to, “stay in the stream of our culture,” Matthew says. “Also, the LDS people have a very negative view

toward vocational pastors, so not taking a salary directly from our church is helpful when connecting with them.” The couple’s disciple-making efforts are geo-centric rather than focused on building large in a single location. They strategize planting at least one microchurch in every Mormon stake in their city.

“Utah is zoned geographically by the Latter-Day Saints into wards and stakes,” he explains. “A ward is a neighborhood that consists of a minimum of 300 LDS members. If you’re Mormon, you go to church in your ward. A stake is a region consisting of six to 12 wards. Our city has 84 wards/congregations equaling 10 stakes. When someone leaves the LDS faith for a relationship with Christ, their local community usually rejects them.”

Anderson is working toward planting a microchurch within every LDS stake in the city so that when people come to faith in Christ, they will have a new faith family within close proximity to their home. The Andersons intend to plant microchurches through relational disciple making.

The groups have the freedom to remain autonomous or to occasionally gather as a network.

Leaders emerge from disciple-making success: “We feel like new Christians mature much quicker when they’re intentionally disciplined and challenged to disciple others,” he says. “A mature disciple of Jesus can easily lead a microchurch without previous ministry experience, Bible college education or seminary training.”

I met Matthew when he joined a discussion about microchurch possibilities at a seminar I taught. A potential Level 5 leader, he says, “The simplicity of a microchurch really lends to multiplication. When multiplication is in a disciple’s DNA, reproduction happens naturally.

Smaller organisms usually have a shorter gestation period, so microchurches have the potential to multiply much quicker than traditional Western churches.”

Anderson’s life is not without tension: “This approach is often misunderstood,” he says. “Many can’t understand why the end goal isn’t to be a large church or to have a beautiful church campus. They think our goals are too small when, in actuality, our goals are much larger than what they can even comprehend. There’s also a personal tension to not make it about being a microchurch. I have to guard myself against pride in the same way a megachurch pastor does. I feel like I need to continually ask myself: *Are we truly making disciples who are multiplying disciples?* Let’s not make microchurches another church fad. If it works well to reach a specific demographic, go for it! We just need to avoid doing things just because it’s trendy.”

Church Planting on Skid Row

Randall Kalama is a young policeman, married to Annie, an executive in the Hawaii Department of Education. They planted a microchurch among mostly homeless people in the skid row section of Honolulu. They used their personal tithes to rent a building and then began meeting with the outcasts of society. This is not a skid row mission. From the beginning, they called it church. They enlisted their disciples (including some from their home church) to operate the church. They even ask homeless people to give offerings to help others. Randall is a single- salary, freelance microchurch planter who trusted God to embark on a unique journey.

“We started PS150 church, not with a traditional church or small group in mind,” Randall says. “It was started as a way for

followers of Christ (no matter where they fellowship) to have a way to step out into the community of Chinatown Honolulu and share the Good News with whomever they met, including houseless people and those with addiction and mental illness who live on the streets. The microchurch concept was not on our radar, we just wanted to do something that was a low threshold to do ministry outside the four walls of a church.”

He continues, “In my humble opinion, smaller churches or low threshold ministries are easier for lay people within the Body of Christ to come together and build relationships and allow more of the congregation to get involved in ministry as opposed to larger gatherings that tend to produce more ‘spectator’ Christians.”

Though they didn’t intend to plant a microchurch, that’s what happened. Randall endorses the idea: “If disciple making is the primary goal for the Church (Great Commission), then a microchurch lends itself to fulfilling this goal. King Jesus modeled this effectively. He preached to the masses, but He spent all His time (three years) with 12 guys—doing life together as well as teaching them.”

This “doing life together” element seems to be missing from our current mode of church life. Randall and Annie moved away from Honolulu for several years, though they’ve since returned. While they were away for three years, the couple lived in Ruidoso, New Mexico (part of the Lincoln National Forest in the Sacramento Mountains of central eastern New Mexico). While they were there, God opened a door, allowing them to meet every Wednesday night at a drug and alcohol rehab center on the Mescalero Apache Indian Reservation bordering Ruidoso.

“We followed the same model we did in Chinatown: meeting consistently (week in/week out); singing praise and worship songs;

reading Scripture and praying together. We've seen men and women transformed and set free from addiction and surrender their lives to King Jesus."

They effectively launched a microchurch inside a rehab center. For this couple, vocational ministry is out of the question. When they started PS150, their jobs were a matter of necessity. Randall and Annie both work full time and had to continue doing their "day jobs" to support themselves. "We used our own resources," Randall says, "and God provided other people to come alongside and help support PS150."

I asked him about challenges and tensions the couple faced when they multiplied our church into what became PS150. "Chinatown Honolulu is a unique place," he said. "Many of the people who are in the area are houseless and battle with substance addiction or mental illness. There are churches in or near Chinatown, but for various reasons the people living on the street don't make it through the doors of those church meetings. We wanted to take the church to them, since we're taught that 'we are the church.'

"The people of God are His ambassadors, representing Him to the world around us. This approach worked for what He called us to do. After three years of ministering in Chinatown, we've seen lives transformed. Some are doing well today; some have gone home to be with King Jesus. The number of these transformations isn't huge, but when we started, we would tell ourselves, 'Even if one comes to know King Jesus and surrender to Him, it's all worth it.' After we left in 2013, God kept the doors for PS150 church open and He raised up others in the Body to step up and out in faith, and they continue to minister in Chinatown today."

New Immigrants and Folks Back Home

Every church has leaders that could do this now. Junji Ono and our entire Japanese-speaking congregation launched several years ago as an autonomous church. They never grew past about 35 people while meeting in a community center. However, after moving to a large home they exploded. The result: an ever-expanding network of Japanese-language house churches in Hawaii, Japan and even Houston. By their third year, they had planted 23 microchurches in Japan. The multiplication grew out of control—a good thing. Today, Junji won't even speculate as to the number of microchurches they have spawned in Japan. He simply doesn't know everyone in the movement.

Missionaries often describe Japanese people as unwilling to open their homes to others. Japanese houses and apartments are small and often crowded—land is extremely expensive. But Junji and his friends proved them wrong. As long as the group continues to elevate a vision to multiply, they could potentially touch every household in a country that has been more resistant to the gospel than most. After more than 600 years of missionary work, less than one percent of

Japanese follow Jesus Christ. Yet Junji's group sees limitless opportunity for multiplying microchurches.

Every example in this chapter describes a person supported by employment outside the congregation, or network, which they pastor. Microchurches are not “just for people on the mission field.”

Francis Chan

Multiplication leader and author Francis Chan recently spoke to a group of Facebook employees. He described the “We Are Church” network of 15 microchurches. Groups are designed to be small so it's more like family where members can actually get to know one another, love one another, and make use of their gifts.

“We've got a few hundred people now, and it costs nothing,” Chan explained. “And everyone's growing and everyone's having to read this book (the Bible) for themselves and people actually caring for one another. I don't even preach. They just meet in their homes, they study, they pray, they care for one another. They're becoming the church, and I'm just loving it and realizing that these 30 guys [are] leading this and the women as well.”

The church involves, “guys coming off the streets, out of prison, to doctors and people that work here (Facebook) or Google.”

Their goal is to double their numbers each year until they touch 1.2 million people in his lifetime. He adds, “It's all free.”

Francis also notes that doing church as a family is messy, “But when it's family, it gets messy. And you start finding out people's dirt. Just like you know about your brother and sister every Thanksgiving. It's messy because it's family. That's what Christ wanted. So we fight for it. And it's been a blast.”²⁸

Remember, I'm not suggesting that we replace anything we have with a bunch of small churches. This isn't an either/or issue. The concept of “or” is a tyrant while “and” is a friend. To plant “macrochurches” OR to plant microchurches is a lousy choice. But to add this to our arsenal might just turn the tide of American

culture back toward our God who loves people that can't, don't and won't fit our current models.

It is important to see the church as a multifaceted affair if you want to multiply at Level 5. No one-size-fits-all in the kingdom of God. No single strategy or ministry form will accommodate everyone. If we would disciple nations we must take our eyes off of the church across town, or the list of the fastest growers. We must focus on the harvest with the knowledge that every farmer plows a piece of ground a little different from every other farmer. The logistics, culture and practices of a microchurch will be influenced by

- A. Whoever disciplined the leader.
- B. The gifts and personality of the planter.
- C. The culture and customs of those evangelized.
- D. The logistics affixed to meeting places, etc.

SECTION 3

HOW TO GET STARTED

CHAPTER 7

Tensions You Will Face

Anytime we attempt something new, we face frustration or tension. Some tensions are self-generated as change ushers in unfamiliarity. Others come from those we serve. And some tensions arise from interaction with our peers.

If we identify tensions ahead of time, they lose the element of surprise and become less alarming.

How you see yourself in light of your expectations will either reinforce your behavior or contribute to general feelings of anxiety. You may score points in terms of world evangelism while failing to live up to some imagination you hold about “real ministry.” Let’s look at some potential tensions of thinking and leading in both “microchurch” and “multisite” situations.

1. The wrong scorecard

One difference between church as we know it and a microchurch (or a multichurch that launches microchurches) is how you measure success. Conventionally, the American Church community measures success by addition—the bigger, the better. But bigger churches won't saturate the country with the gospel. However, *more* churches can.

Microchurches measure success in terms of intimacy, involvement, and evangelism. Granted, these areas are difficult to quantify. An easier measure is the number of microchurches in a given location. This is where the multichurch model becomes important. It's easier to set goals and measure results when you think in terms of numbers of congregations coupled with an (estimated) average number of people.

2. Time vs money

Microchurches cost virtually no money to operate. Financial costs may be low, but time is an issue. Leading a microchurch, or a multichurch network, requires lots of time. Prepare yourself to delegate more than ever before. If you don't, the church could swallow your family. Jeph Chavez says, "The microchurch releases a pastor from having to put all their time, resources and attention on the material aspects of a conventional church plant (building, budgets, programs, marketing, etc.) to making disciples who will pastor their community. A microchurch doesn't cost a lot of money. Starbucks can be your office. Your home or the home of a core team member can be the gathering place; and freelance volunteers can be your staff. With this understanding, the multiplication timeframe is reduced to equipping the character and

mission of the planter, rather than the accumulation of resources for a large church-planting launch.”

A microchurch should not be a conventional church in microcosm. Think of most churches as triangles with a key leader at the top and member/consumers at the bottom. This is not a bad thing. You can build a Level 5 multiplying church this way and at a larger size structural logistics strongly favor a triangle. But a microchurch should look more like a circle with each member contributing to the others. This is where “self-discovery” becomes important. Rather than preparing a sermon, a microchurch pastor can assign scripture then “conduct the orchestra” when the group gathers for the teaching (self-discovery from scripture), fellowship, prayer and communion. Such a model vastly reduces the load carried by a freelance pastor.

3. The temptation to play Pope

This tension applies to multichurch leadership. As a multichurch pastor, you’ll be tempted to maintain control of everything in every group. A healthy sense of responsibility can kill you if you assume control that belongs to the Lord of the Church. And too much control limits the ability to reproduce. You may not believe in someone just because you don’t know them, which slows down whoever’s discipling them toward planting a church.

If you get caught up in how others operate, you’ll find yourself bogged down with management rather than disciple making. What could become a movement of hundreds of churches will stall as a network of a dozen or so. Control others’ thinking by making disciples who obey Jesus, and you won’t need to control behavior. This works best if you’re serious about discipling people

into ministry rather than hiring from outside your circle. Almost 50 years of ministry experience has shown me that working with “hired guns” demands more control down the line.

The best antidote to these problems is a minimal ecclesiology (one of the 12 characteristics of a multiplication movement we covered in chapter 1) coupled with a simple doctrinal position. As long as everyone agrees to these, let them operate as they see fit. You want to maintain unity by occasional fellowship/training events for leaders. And if someone veers away from your agreed principles, bless them to launch a separate movement. Maintain distinctions, not divisiveness.

4. Clergy-laity perceptions

If you decide to move toward planting a microchurch, someone will criticize you for stepping outside the norm, usually playing out in incorrect labels and accusations: The pastors you launch aren’t “properly educated” or you’re a “cult leader” if you don’t line up with a denomination.

This happened to me in our early days. The problem was that local churches planting churches was so far outside our denominational norms that others felt threatened by our activities. The word, “cult,” was an easy way to treat someone as a category, not as a person that didn’t need to explain or understand. When we later enjoyed face-to-face encounters, this changed. It's easier to discount strangers than friends.

The issue of proper theological training was a bigger roadblock for us. Shortly after we sent Rich Agozino to plant the first church from our own, a neighboring pastor who possessed both a D. Min.

and a Ph.D. grilled him with, “So, Richard, where did you study for the ministry?”

He knew full well that Rich had come up through the Navigators but that actual preparation for planting was time spent with me—lots of it. I was embarrassed to hear that Richard fired back, “I studied under Ralph Moore at Hope Chapel. They have more than a thousand people in church. So, how many people attend yours?” The other guy’s attendance hovered around 150 (this was a time when a thousand people was considered a megachurch). Education is valuable but not as a club to beat up on others. BTW, Richard went on to multiply four churches from the congregation of 400 people he planted.

Morph your church into a multichurch, and someone will accuse you of having delusions of grandeur. We must get used to criticism. I like what Aristotle said about avoiding criticism: “Criticism is something we can avoid easily by saying nothing, doing nothing, and being nothing.” While we were members of a denomination, we constantly battled against the charge that we were trying to start one of our own. After leaving that family, we now ward off church planters who want to attach themselves to us legally. I refuse to become the president of anything because administrative details would slow the task of developing new leaders. The Apostle Paul never started an organization or even named a church. I want to live like him.

One surprising area of concern comes from congregants who feel safer as spectators. They don’t participate because they expect you to do everything: “After all, what did they teach you in seminary?” Be sensitive to their feelings but don’t give in to them. I’ve found it best to search out the people who can accept change and “move with the movers.” Leave the rest undisturbed.

5. What to do with the kids?

One tension arising in microchurches is that they don't provide a well-oiled program for children. The answer comes from involving them in the life of the group. I currently lead a home group attached to the church I pastor. Four people speak Mandarin—including a seven-year-old girl. She does crafts at a table near the main group, and we always include her in the discussions. She contributes amazing insights and takes home a sense of inclusion.

Involving children in adult small group situations is a tickly subject. Some hire babysitters. Others lock them in a room with Disney DVDs. My wife and I made an early decision to include ours in as much of the discussion as was practical for their ages. They would bring toys or sit next to one of us playing games on paper (today they could use an iPad). As with our current group, we invited them into the conversation once it began to roll. The long-term results of those relationships were that they found their first after-school jobs with members of that group (several of those adults moved with us from California to Hawaii to plant the church). The greater results are that my son succeeded me as pastor of Hope Chapel Kaneohe Bay (now Anchor Church) and my daughter, a Fuller Seminary grad, leads outreach teams to the Middle East.

6. Costs to a sponsoring church

If you pastor an existing church, this specific tension probably comes from your board. The thought of a few people starting something away from the main campus can frighten them. They fear a loss of money and manpower. Someone said, "Once you build a complicated machine, you need to maintain it." Churches

most focused on addition feel the heat on this one. The move from addition to multiplication will generate this tension.

The answer here is to go slow. Educate your people using the data we talked about in the introduction to this book. Help them to see that the U.S. Church is currently falling short of the Great Commission. Teach them that we will lose our place at the cultural table if we don't do something different. Offer microchurch as one option—not a silver bullet. Let them choose how to address the shortfall of churches and converts.

7. Peer group tensions

One major obstacle to innovation is peer pressure. We don't get over it in high school. Much of the tension you face when you try something different comes from other pastors. If you try to march to their drum, you're sunk.

Back in the 1970s, we planted the first Hope Chapel. Our initial congregation was largely hippies, bikers and an exotic dancer. These people were hungry for Jesus. Unfortunately, the other pastors in our community couldn't look past outer appearance, and we were labeled “Hippity-hoppity Hope” and “Dope Chapel.” If we had listened to these pastors, a couple of thousand churches would never have been born.

My advice: Smile, nod in a friendly manner—and then do the right thing.

8. “Not a real church.”

I recently published a [blog post](#), called “Planting Pocket Churches”²⁹ about microchurches, which spurred some thought-provoking discussion. Two people commented that they had tried

planting microchurches with success. One urged me to shy away from the terms “pastor” and “church” because they caused him so much grief. When he used that (New Testament)

terminology, he was slandered for it because the network he planted didn’t include “real churches,” his critics said. He suggested that we retreat to the term “Bible study” because this would make it more palatable to those people who do not need what we have to offer—they already have it! The idea that a microchurch is not real comes from cultural Christianity. Ask any card-carrying agnostic, or atheist, if they would prefer a church centered around a meal and open discussion or a typical hour-and-a-half entertainment-oriented church service and find out for yourself which is the pathway to our future.

Microchurch leader Wayne Ching (you met him in chapter 5), weighs in on the issue: “At one time, our members were advised by family members to ‘go find a real church.’ This is due to confusion over what a house church is or does and seeing cultural norms as requirements for being a church.”

It’s important to note that the people Wayne pastors are getting the gospel in their own cultural context rather than the somewhat foreign setting of our evangelical church culture. For them, the microchurch is the real church. Our increasingly resistant culture needs a church form that connects with it relationally. We must root everything in Scripture while we speak the language(s) of those we hope to evangelize.

Again, I want to stress simplicity when you define church. If it looks like a duck ... right? Learn to wed Scripture, need, and culture while ignoring tradition. If it won’t fly in Ethiopia without the benefit of Greek studies, it might be superfluous.

You can change the world if you keep things simple, practical and reproducible.

9. Fuzzy copies

If you run a document through a copy machine you get a near-perfect copy. Copy that document, and you lose a little more clarity. Copy that copy ... and so on. In the end, you have a very fuzzy representation of the original document. Inevitably, pastors bring up the “fuzzy copy” argument when discussing these church multiplication issues. My answer always goes back to the Word and the Spirit. The Holy Spirit and the Bible have carried countless Christians through times of persecution and a dearth of religious education.

Sure, the Church of England saw things differently from the Puritans. But you do, too. The Chinese Church hosts some interesting theology, but that doesn’t keep those people from Heaven. I mentioned earlier the Russian Orthodox believers who kiss the caskets of embalmed saints (in every church building—they have lots of saints). It was the Orthodox Church that gave the Communists the idea of embalming Lenin.

Fuzzy copies, yes, but still copies. Each group I mentioned sees the gospel through different eyes than you do. But so does the church down the street. When we focus on the enduring truth of the Word and the Spirit, the picture becomes clearer.

10. Short-life churches

Most microchurches will last a long time. Wayne Ching has led the same group for more than two decades. On the other hand, some of Wendell Elento’s churches have had a far shorter lifecycle due

to job changes and people moving away. But would you want him to stop what he's doing because of a short lifecycle? What about those people he disciplined in each church (he continues to lead several)? The average American church has a lifecycle of 30 to 50 years. No one would deny their right to exist because of that. This is where our scorecard comes into play. Are we pursuing the purpose of the Church? The number of disciples we make and send out is our measure of success—not the lifeline of a church. Even today's largest churches in the United States won't be with us in 75 years, if history is any guide. The healthiest congregations will multiply others. Those attached to a multichurch network almost never stop operating.

However, some do stop meeting. So, what? If a group meets for years, or even just months, good things happen. I've watched a few groups disassemble only to see their members form new groups or migrate to other churches. And what of the evangelism that takes place while the group existed? That fruit goes on to eternity. The short-life argument fails to consider that every church has a lifecycle. Good things do come to an end.

My friend, John Gupta, came to Christ through a church in Madras, India, which claims the Apostle Thomas (Didymus, the twin) as its founder. That would make it the longest-lived congregation I know. London's St. Paul's Cathedral dates history to a continuous worship dating back to 604 AD. But most churches won't last for centuries. Every year, thousands of churches

close in America. Somehow, they get exempted from the short-life criticism. It seems that we can overlook a church closure if we have spent thousands of dollars educating a pastor or millions on real estate. To put it bluntly, this is a bogus argument in light of eternity.

CHAPTER 8

Question: Does This Fit Me?

If I've done my job, by now you are considering the implications of this book for your own life.

If you are up to your neck in plans to plant a church, I hope what I've written helps you to hit the ground as a Level 5 multiplying church in microcosm. If you are struggling at Level 1 or plateaued at Level 2 you need to understand that planting a microchurch would breathe life and vision into your church. If you are at Level 3 you must accept that you've been given much so much will be required—you should begin to develop strategies to platform a movement. If your church is a Level 4 reproducing congregation my prayer is that you will adopt a boutique operating system which is different from the franchise model that currently serves you.

My friend, Todd Wilson, wrote a book that would help you. It's available as a free download at exponential.org. It's called, [*The Emerging Micro-Church Era: Addition, Reproduction, or Multiplication?*](#)

The book is a great tool for assessing the feasibility of microchurches as an operating efficiency in your overall multiplication plans. I'll summarize 10 assessment questions asked by the book, but you will do yourself a favor if you download and read it in entirety.

1. Is micro-church the right next step for us?

You may find that microchurch is a model that allows you to multiply because of its limited costs. Or, you may have moved from megachurch to planting several sites only to realize that the individual sites carry a burden of overhead that is too much for the health of your church.

In these cases, or any other, this is the primary question. You'll be better equipped to answer it as you answer the other nine.

2. What is our motive for considering micro-church?

Ask yourself, "Why am I even considering this?" You'll probably get several answers. Prioritize them then ask the question again. Try to sort out your root motivation. Ask, "Do I see this as another opportunity to add capacity or am I willing to let go of people, money and control to expand the Kingdom of God? These answers are crucial.

If you haven't already download [*Becoming a Level Five Multiplying Church*](#) and read it together with your team. Be sure you get your motivation carved in stone as the journey in front of you will be more revolutionary than evolutionary. You aren't just adding a new

piece of software, you're adopting a different operating system. Discern whether you have the courage necessary to revolutionary change.

3. How do our core values impact our decision about microchurch?

Examine your calendar and budget. These will reveal your core values more effectively than looking at the mission statement on your website. Engage your most trusted leaders in a discussion about the implications of your core values intersecting with a movement of microchurches led by freelance pastors. Ask how birthing such a movement would impact what you've built around your current value set.

The Exponential FREE eBook [*Spark: Igniting a Culture of Multiplication*](#) (available for FREE download at exponential.org) introduces a simple model for a healthy culture. Compare that model to your current value set before deciding to move ahead with multiplication.

4. What does microchurch look like in our context?

Churches that choose to empower members as elders or leaders of microchurches will naturally extrapolate the strengths and benefits of existing systems. The key is to adapt them to an entirely different operating system. The goal isn't to create micro-cathedrals or micro-megachurches.

This is a different organism. It is a minimal expression of the body of Christ reaching into communities of people otherwise untouched by the gospel.

Churches will naturally extrapolate the strengths and benefits of the mega and multi models and adapt them into the micro. Consequently, for most churches the default approach will be extending what's already being done into new locations. Specifically, most churches will likely be attracted to the potential for replicating their training content/Sunday programming into new, extended, lower-cost venues that have the potential to reach more people (the love language of Level 3 addition-focused churches). The most natural expression equates to the convergence of small groups, technology, high-quality training materials, and decentralized delivery systems— all within our current grasp.

**5. What does “wildly successful” look like in our context?
Will our default way of implementing micro-churches
produce the transformative impact we’re searching for?**

You need to describe your end goals before you set out. What would look wildly successful to you? Try not to attach numbers to this, but ratios. Think about a percentage of a community engaged with Christ. Or, you may want to see 90 percent of the people in your microchurches as a result of someone discipling them into Christ. A meaningful goal would be to ask what percentage of your members should be catalyzed by God's unique call for them and mobilized to fulfill that calling. Decide on these outcomes before teaching others to multiply microchurches.

The Exponential eBook [*Dream Big, Plan Smart: Discovering Your Pathway to Level 5 Multiplication*](#) (available for FREE download at exponential.org) will help you think through these factors:

A workable process for biblical disciple making; Both addition and multiplication capacity building;

The mobilization of Christ followers on mission within the sweet spot of their unique personal calling.

6. What strengths are we building on, and how might these strengths create limitations to true multiplication if we're not careful?

While good stewardship requires that you utilize past victories and practices wherever they are applicable, you need to be careful that you are not bringing limitations into what is a different operating system than the one that brought you to the threshold of multiplication.

The desire to “clone for quality,” or to brand something builds on lessons learned and standards of excellence. But, be careful. These befit a franchise model of reproduction far better than a boutique model of multiplication. In the boutique model, people take more chances, make more mistakes but generate ministry more suitable to a different community than the one that birthed them. The franchise model works best if you need the safety of control mechanisms and you are trying to reach people of much the same socio-economic flavor as yourself.

You'll find much more on this question if you download, [*The Emerging Micro-Church Era: Addition, Reproduction, or Multiplication?*](#)

7. What barriers are we likely to face?

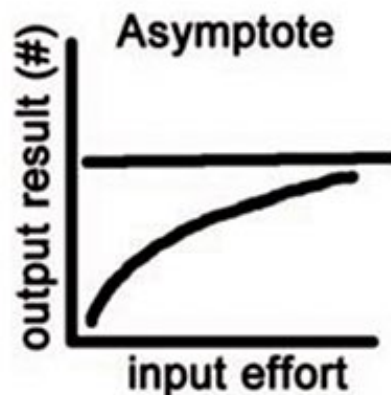
You will face barriers and growth resisting obstacles. Some are the tensions we discuss in the next chapter.

Perhaps the most obvious barrier to multiplication is management as you scale up from a handful of microchurches to hundreds of thousands. How will you retain a biblio-centric

posture throughout the movement? What must you do to keep everything focused on Jesus and on the mission of disciples making disciples? How will you preserve a culture that allows for every member of Christ's body to pursue their own unique calling within your expanding tribe? How will you handle matters of discipline as they inevitably arise? Will every microchurch be autonomous while linked through discipling relationships or is that too loose for you?

Again, technology can be a huge help. When the first church I led began reproducing we didn't have the internet, email or cell phones. Today we can create private chat rooms and live online group conversations. The apostles, Paul and Barnabas, didn't even have an effective mail system to help support the disciples, deemed elders, and turned over the Holy Spirit in whom they had put their trust (Acts 14:23).

As your movement grows the barriers will slow you. In mathematics these barriers are known as "asymptotes." An asymptote is a limit or barrier that arises from within your practices, doctrines and cultural factors. The goal is to begin a new growth curve built along slightly different operating factors as each previous one slows. The reality is to ask God to help remove the limiting factor or to give you the wisdom to do so.



The Exponential FREE eBook [*Spark: Igniting a Culture of Multiplication*](#) (available for FREE download via exponential.org) addresses this principle and offers keys to unlock the doors as you meet them. In more conventional churches these barriers appear as attendance plateaus around 120, 200, 500, 800, 2,000, etc. In movements the barriers are just as real and arise due to motivational, organizational and communications restraints. Asymptotes are unavoidable, but God will see you past them as you seek his leadership over his church(es).

8. Does the simplicity / complexity of our strategy inherently catalyze or hinder multiplication?

The complexities of running mega and multisite churches vie with the complexities of our current church planting models. All require intricate systems, skilled professional personnel and large budgets. This forces us into a “we can do it, you can help” approach to members as volunteers to maintain these organizations. If we adopt a “you can do it, we can help” approach to re-visualizing our churches as platforms for other people’s ministries we can see entire movements of microchurches birthed from a single congregation.

Add in the complimenting factor of a freelance pastor and the costs of implementing the Great Commission look much like what it cost in the Book of Acts. Travel, food and shelter allowed a handful of ordinary people to take the gospel from Jerusalem to Antioch (Acts 11:19-22). Later the professionals, Barnabas and Saul, had the same limited costs to consider. The possibilities extant in multiplying microchurches led by freelance pastors brings

us back to the simplicity and limitless opportunity faced by these early Christ-followers.

9. What is our minimum ecclesiology for the structure and governance of church? Will that hinder true multiplication?

You need to settle on your own minimal ecclesiology, so you can operate with an open heart toward God and for the practical purpose of doing ministry biblically and righteously. If you choose to platform a movement using microchurches as a tool for multiplication, you will be questioned over issues of theology, structure and governance. The people who question you may substitute denominational or cultural church protocol for actual ecclesiology, so the answers you give must apply to churches of every size or stripe. You'll find a good case study in the podcast, [*Play Thuno -- The World-Changing Multiplication Game*](#).

At the risk of becoming too prescriptive I want to offer two starting places for formulating a minimal, therefore more flexible, ecclesiology. The first is my friend, Brian Sanders, device. He simply asks that a church include worship (living under the lordship of Christ), community (mutual sharing and ministry) and mission (making disciples in unique places and living Luke 4:18). Another approach is to ask, “Are we equipping every member to minister as described in Ephesians 4?” and, “Do the functions mentioned in Acts 2:41-47 happen in our midst.”

I'm including my own ecclesiological minimums here as thought starters. I only speak for myself, not for Exponential. Each person or tribe will need to think through three issues and arrive at their own minimums. I'm looking at three questions when

I think of minimums: What is a disciple? What is a church? What is a pastor?

I want to be careful to note that though I'm writing in light of microchurches, these thoughts would qualify/disqualify some of the more well-known institutional congregations in America. In my mind these minimums apply to every church. Not everything we call a church meets these minimums.

- **Disciple:** Jesus bookends the markers for true disciples through his words to his own. The first qualifier is a follower of Christ who invites others to follow—a fisher of men. The second qualifier is one who obeys all that Jesus commands. This definition includes a person doing daily devotions, giving to the church and growing in Christ. But it does not stop with these rather static notions. It demands a more radical surrender. If a person is making disciples while following Christ and living in obedience they are a disciple. If they don't meet these minimums I can't see the discipling process as fully functional.
- **Church:** A church is a gathering of Christ-followers where two scriptures come into play. The first is Acts 2:41-47. If I don't see the apostle's teaching, fellowship, breaking of bread, prayer, answers to prayer, generous giving, God-praising and effective evangelism I can't call it a church. The second qualifier is that each member plays a part in the building up of the body, using their gifts toward this end. The church is a body, and each member plays their part to grow to maturity and effect change in the world through love and operation with their individual spiritual gifts. That is, the fruit of each believer's faith is action, and these actions build up the body as a whole (Eph. 4:10-16;

1 Cor. 12:4-31). This is more an outcome of spiritual maturity than a prerequisite for launching something. However, if these are missing, it's time to reevaluate your ministry.

- **Pastor or Elder:** The word pastor (poimen) appears only in Ephesians 4. The connotation is that this person governs and teaches. The Greek term is different but the function equates to that of an elder (presbuteros) or overseer (episkopoi). The term elder first applies to maturity as both Old and New Testaments use the term in regard to age. For me this means that the more mature Christ-followers in a community present the threshold for inclusion as elders. After that, I'm looking for proven ministry and the endorsement of a sending church and its body of elders. I get frustrated with the term elder, or even deacon, when applied to a politically appointed group of people who don't actually function in a governing/teaching capacity. The Great Commission is all about going and teaching. If these functions are absent, the title becomes meaningless.

Again, you need to develop your own minimums. As you do, remember that if they are too loose they will cause blisters like a shoe that is two sizes too large. If they are too small the option is to go barefoot or cut off a couple of toes. Your ecclesiology must fit both scripture and the unique callings of those you would equip and platform.

10. Where are we on the innovation curve, and how does this affect our decision?

As I approach this question, I feel compelled to quote rather than summarize. I lifted the following paragraphs from [*The Emerging Micro-Church Era: Addition, Reproduction, or Multiplication?*](#)

When Leadership Network convened some pioneering churches in 2001, multisite was an “innovation.” Many of these churches created the maps for the rest of the church world. Experts suggest that at the time, only a handful of multisite churches existed in the United States. Today, less than 20 years later, Leadership Network reports more than 8,000 multisite churches.

This increase represents what communications professor Everett Rodgers popularized as the *diffusion of innovation* theory. Rodgers sought to explain how some ideas turn into innovations that spread to the masses. He identified five categories of innovation “adopters,” including innovators (the pioneers that create the maps for everyone else, representing 2.5 percent of a population); early adopters (the people who first embrace the innovation before it’s even fully proven, representing 13.5 percent); the early majority (34 percent); the late majority (also 34 percent), and the laggards (16 percent).

Let’s assume “micro-focused” churches are an innovation waiting to happen. Currently, we’re in the early stages where the innovators (2.5 percent) will begin experimenting and creating the maps for the future. Where should your church be on the innovation curve? Don’t jump too quickly. Where you *want* to be might not be where you *should* be!

Consider three Additional Questions:

1. Where do my heart and head say we'd like to be on the curve?

Your heart may be telling you one thing, but is it the right thing?
Does your heart align with your head?

2. Where have we historically been on the curve with past innovations?

The past is our best predictor of the future. Do you have a pattern and history of being innovators, early adopters, early majority, late majority, or laggards? You may not know it, but a pattern is likely embedded into your DNA and culture, and that's hard to change.

3. Given the reality of our history and context, where is it prudent for us to be?

Should you wait for some roadmaps and stability to minimize risk?
Or should you jump in early?

As you approach these 10 questions and work through your church's response, keep in mind both the potential opportunity for multiplication, as well as the potential distraction. As we look toward Jesus' multiplication vision for His Church (Acts 1:8), the emerging microchurch era offers real hope for multiplying His witnesses "to the ends of the earth." Stewarded with multiplication as the goal, we will make quantum leaps toward seeing the less than 4 percent of churches in the United States increase to a Kingdom-advancing tipping point of 10 percent.

CHAPTER 9

Three Personal Moves Toward a New Wineskin

To become the leader of a Level 5 multiplying church requires a profound adjustment. At Level 5 you need a different operating system than you do at Level 3. The transition is analogous to switching from Android to IOS. The move may appear simple, but its implications are massive.

You'll face a measure of opposition in the process, or at least a fair dose of scorn. It might be difficult to convince an entrenched church board of the value of these transitions (I strongly suggest that you meet with your board to read and discuss Exponential's watershed book, [*Becoming a Level 5ive Multiplying Church*](#) by Todd Wilson, Dave Ferguson and Alan Hirsch,³⁰ to disciple them toward the need for change).

You will likely face three difficult transitions. They are essential to implementing a new scorecard that places more value on Level 5 multiplication than on Level 3 addition.

1. From CEO to Disciplemaker.

Our culture is loaded with hierarchies. We make superheroes out of the likes of Elon Musk (Tesla technology) and Jeff Bezos (founder of Amazon), rejoicing in their hierarchical successes. Simultaneously, we vilify leaders whom we perceive to overstep their bounds (such as U.S. presidents) or leaders of companies that succeeded a generation ago like Walmart or McDonalds.

Good or bad, hierarchical thinking moves the church away from shared leadership (APEST) to casting the pastor/teacher in the CEO role. Personally, I find playing the CEO ego-satisfying and would enjoy it if it weren't for those pesky scriptures about making disciples who make disciples.

I've come to identify with Barnabas, the son of encouragement. Barnabas made it his business to bless others while nudging them toward fruitful service. He first shows up to aid a poverty-stricken church in Jerusalem. Later, he champions Saul of Tarsus to the Jerusalem elders. He then endorses the church at Antioch before running off to recruit Saul. After this, he discipless Saul but eventually parts company with him over John Mark. Saul (Paul) wrote two-thirds of the books in the New Testament, and Mark gave us the first gospel. Where would we be without Barnabas (who ended life in obscurity)?

If Barnabas hadn't believed in Saul and then Mark (and expressed that belief to them and others), we might not have the New Testament, as we know it. I'm not sure what we would do

without him, but I know that one day this consummate hero maker will hear, “Well done, good and faithful servant. Enter into the joy of your Master.”

I want to be Barnabas when I grow up.

As a leader in my church, I make disciples in groups and individually. I currently work with three groups each week along with individually discipling two young millennial men who show promise as church planters. All this in a congregation numbering fewer than 300 people. When I pastored two megachurches, I held the same priorities. My job description then and now is to:

1. Hear from God.
2. Love my family.
3. Make disciples.
4. Preach sermons that anchor our disciple-making network.
5. Administer the church (but that is simplified by the existence of our disciple-making systems).

2. From hero to hero maker.

Hero making is easy for me. I like to tell stories, especially about the accomplishments of those I discipled. It’s even better to tell stories of the exploits of my disciples’ disciples. Richard Agozino, who planted the first church coming out of our fledgling congregation back in 1971, is famous throughout the Hope Chapel world. After we moved to Hawaii, distance intervened, causing us to lose touch for several years. At a recent reunion, it was fun to watch him register surprise at his face in my books and the sense that “everybody knows his story.”

We show testimony videos in church on a regular basis—stories of ordinary people doing extraordinary things. Each weekend, church members bring personal testimonies before praying over our tithes. It's another way to make heroes of "ordinary people." And I use stories from our movement for more than half of my sermon illustrations.

I wish everyone was a hero maker. I once heard a pastor tell a dramatic story about how he triumphantly shared his faith with a Buddhist priest. That afternoon, I stumbled on to the exact same story in another person's autobiography. I don't know if I was more taken back by the coincidence or the fact that the speaker stole someone else's story. This pastor seemed stuck on making himself the hero in every story. I want to do the opposite. I know that I will become a hero if my disciples do great things. A major part of my job is to make them understand their own heroics. Another element is the momentum we gain when others hear the stories and say, "I could do something like that..."

3. From accumulator to sender.

At Level 3, churches accumulate followers. The idea is to build the biggest church possible in hopes of fulfilling the Great Commission in our community. Many Level 3 churches are expanding to a multisite model, which extends the boundaries of the gospel. This is a good thing. However, Level 3 is self-limiting in two ways. First, it confines us to people who look much like us. Most American megachurches are predominantly Caucasian or African-American. Most are located in the suburbs. Five of the 100 largest churches in America are pastored by African Americans. Caucasians lead the rest. Of the 1,664 U.S. churches

numbering more than 2,000 members, several hundred are African American, 33 are Hispanic, one is Russian and 25 are Asian American—23 of those post-Korean language websites. One Chinese and one Japanese church made the list.³⁰

CHAPTER 10

Five Tangible Steps Toward Level 5 Multiplication

When we build a church-planting pipeline into the fabric of our disciple-making process and develop a simple plan that guides a leader from a questioning “pre-believer” to an equipped “church planter,” we begin to position ourselves for multiplication.

We like to look at every new convert as a potential overseas church planter. Most won’t ever plant a church, let alone do it overseas, but by raising the bar this high for ourselves, we pull everyone farther than they would go otherwise. At the end of the day, a new disciple should understand five to seven steps leading to planting a church on their own. You’ll need to structure your own process, but here are some steps you can take in that direction...

1. Learn more and build a working theology.

A wise friend once scolded me, “If you ain’t reading, you ain’t leading!” (he used “ain’t” to amplify his words). It stuck. And it should stick on you. If this book has your attention, seek out others who like it. Check the endnotes of this book for sources, then look for them on Amazon. Search the “customers who bought this item also bought” function on Amazon. Take advantage of the hundreds of free tools at exponential.org. Read Roy Moran’s [*Spent Matches: Igniting the Signal Fire for the Spiritually Dissatisfied*](#) with eye toward free-standing microchurches when he describes his approach to what are essentially home groups attached to his church. With a few tweaks, we found Moran’s model a near template for how to operate a, “single-salary, freelance-pastored microchurch.”

Build a small library and soak in it. After that, assemble notes and compare them to your Bible. Build a working theology to describe how you might launch a church multiplication movement from within your local church, including only your disciples and theirs in the task. I like to have a written theology for every element of a new project. It’s His church; it should involve His values.

Multiplication leader Rac Racoma planted three microchurches among troubled Filipino youth in Hawaii. Most were in their late teens or early 20s, Rac was in his early 50s. Rac is impatient with people who camp out on theology while the fields remain ready for harvest. I asked him, “What would you say to pastors of a conventional church that might motivate them to launch a movement of microchurches?” He said he would encourage them toward “seriously looking at their present standards on church

leadership and to take the risk that comes with lowering that bar in developing leadership. Also, to look into having a measuring system that compares present systems' effectiveness in engaging marginal people groups to start a microchurch and to begin seeing with softer eyes the potential of people of less recognition.

“It’s really about allowing people to express their giftings. As leaders, we are to assist them in getting them there.”

2. Recruit and disciple a few radicals.

To help you use what this looks like practically, I’ll break down the process into steps:

Look around you for the people in your church whom you believe could successfully launch a “discipleship-trained, single-salary, freelance-planted microchurch” six months from when you complete your personal theology of microchurch and its place in the ecosystem of evangelical Christianity.

Narrow the list to those who like change and are likely seen as a little radical. (These are the early adopters and map makers we talked about earlier.)

Approach these potential leaders individually, disclosing your idea. After mutual prayer, recruit three or four people, no more than seven.

Disciple these people, beginning with your written theology (which should be pretty informal). After looking through your stuff, read and discuss books that might stoke their fire. Download some of the free tools at exponential.org and then use them to make disciples who might plant microchurches.

That was the easy part, but probably the less productive of the groups you might recruit.

Think of radical political groups, whether it be the Soviet Revolution a century ago, Shining Path in recent years, David Koresh and his tragic following, or the recent outburst of violent Islam. In every case, these groups found it effective to search out unhappy disaffected people who believed the world could be a better place if it weren't for systems that had turned unresponsive to the truth.

A lot of Christ followers fit that profile. Who are the believers who have left the local church, “to preserve my faith”? They are ripe for revolutionary activity. They hunger for more than “attractional churches” can possibly offer. These people are connected with others of their ilk. My only advice here is to get to know some of these people and then see where your friendship leads.

I recently met a young man who fit the above profile. He professed hatred for “your typical church.” I asked him if he would consider gathering a few friends for a “Beer, Barbeque and Bible talk.” The idea would be to Xerox a passage of Scripture and then ask everyone to come ready to talk about it the following week—no sermon, just the Spirit and the Word (no singing either). He jumped on the idea. If that's too radical for you, you might want to rethink the criticism of Jesus for hanging out with winebibbers and sinners.

3. Plant a church as an experiment.

Send some of these disciples out to launch a microchurch with the understanding that it might always remain micro, or it may grow to whatever size the Lord deems appropriate. But they should understand that you expect them to multiply a new church within

the first 12 to 18 months. We can experiment, but we should always think four generations out (2 Timothy 2:2). This removes the pressure to put big numbers on the board as soon as we hit the field.

Small scale R & D (research and development) is crucial to a megachurch. If your team is used to starting everything big, they won't easily handle a big failure. I have a friend in Oregon who pastors the church that planted more than 60 congregations before we ever planted one. We're talking about a church bigger than most in the state, and it got that way while multiplying congregations. Then the original pastor died. His successor never attempted to plant until I badgered him into it. Sadly, two things went wrong:

1. I pressed him to plant without first making disciples who were up to the task.
2. They invested big money and a sizeable chunk of their members in what could only be described as an experiment. When it went down in flames, I was the real culprit (in my mind, not theirs). But the church elders couldn't stand the failure.

They were used to being “best” at everything. They never tried to reproduce again. Had that pastor not fallen for the argument that suggests you must start big to be significant, this church might have still failed. However, they would probably have kept at it until they understood what they were doing.

Treat this as a prototype. You won't get everything right the first time, but you can learn from your mistakes. If the first one fails, don't give up. Do an autopsy to discern the cause of the failure and be sure to avoid the mistakes in your second attempt.

I asked one of our planters, Jeph Chavez, “What would you say to pastors of a conventional church that might motivate them to launch a movement of microchurches?” His response is instructional for any leader:

“If our conviction is really to make disciples, then we must recognize that within our congregations, there are individuals who possess a call and the gift mix to pastor their own congregation. They may not be megachurch pastors or even conventional church planters, but they are called to pastor. However, if we limit their opportunity to just a home group or small group role within our congregation, we may never see their true passion and calling come forth. The autonomy that the microchurch movement offers becomes attractive to those that can recognize there is more in them than just pastoring a small group under their local church’s leadership and direction. It allows for a vision and uniqueness to come forth out of the individuals that otherwise would remain dormant or become a source of frustration and tension with the leadership. Unfortunately, this is why we see individuals leave the local church or just settle into a mundane, non-participatory role in the church.”

The Racomas have participated in our Kenya churches, training pastors there. But more exciting is the linkage between their Filipino family in Honolulu and villages in the Philippines. Rac and Veronica now organize a microchurch-planting operation more than 5,500 miles from where they live. It will travel through “persons of peace” they already know. They will use the alleviation of poverty to open the doors, but poverty relief isn’t the issue. Disciple-making and church multiplication are center stage.

4. Scale up from your experiment.

Once you have a working but flexible model, you can bring others into your disciple making; brag on the success of the first few churches, then preach about becoming a movement that changes culture.

We still get mileage from the story of our first daughter church in California. That story inspired Sonny Shimaoka to plant a church on the big Island of Hawaii on our first birthday as a church on Oahu. The important part of the story is that he lived and worked on Oahu. Twice a week, he flew to the Big Island as a single-salary freelance microchurch planter until his company closed operations on Oahu. Offered the chance to move with the company, he refused and moved to the Big Island where he found employment. The church eventually grew large enough to support his family and multiply several others. I tell that story often.

The secret to making this model work are the lessons you learn from the initial experiment. You scale up the successes by replicating what worked. You trim back whatever didn't work, freeing assets for what does. Begin to think about scaling up in terms of more microchurches. Make provisions for those that grow larger than what you expected. And plan on some people moving away and doing what they learned from you in far-off locations (or the next county). Plan to endorse multiplication growth. Be a hero maker—making heroes of the people who plant microchurches. Doing so will inspire others to give it a shot. By the way, don't give up just because one of your planters turns out to be a Judas. If Jesus took the hit, you can too.

5. Build support mechanisms.

If you build a franchise, it will be easy to structure a network that holds everyone together. I know of one successful Level 4 group that has this down so tight that their “church plant kits” include trucks fitted exactly to hold the identical batch of music/audio/video/signage/hospitality equipment that they issue every church plant. They centralize finances, with each church surrendering its entire offering to the central congregation. They’ve branded their package to a degree that a Fortune 500 company might envy. But remember that neither Jesus nor Paul named any church. And the church in Philippi didn’t look a whole like the one in Corinth.

Would I call the church I just described a success? The answer is a resounding yes! They’ve created a network that will change the communities where they serve. But, they are not, and will not, become a Level 5 multiplying network. The very control issues that make them a good network preclude the hodgepodge nature of a viral network.

If you launch a series of boutique or free-standing churches, your job gets a lot harder. But the potential to change history grows exponentially. You’ll need to establish strong but informal connectivity between the churches. Social media can be a great help here. So can a private-access website. Large training venues fit the picture but become less effective as the movement grows. We once assembled about 140 leaders and felt proud of ourselves until we realized that, at that point, there were more than 700 churches in the network.

Asked hard questions about our numbers, we grudgingly improvised a survey of all our churches (we had done this about every four years until it got too cumbersome, and we decided

it wasn't worth the effort). The survey was a simple email blast asking each church to identify those they had planted by

- A. The pastor's name.
- B. The location.
- C. The church name.
- D. The year started.
- E. An email address.
- F. Any known churches that they may have planted.

We followed this with a second email blast. The survey came to a total of 2,317 churches that find their roots in Hope Chapel. This was in 2016. Immediately after publishing the results, I got angry emails from two pastors questioning why their church plants weren't included in the report (because they never answered their emails). We also discovered five churches that were born during the six weeks it took to compile the survey. This is the nature of a movement—messy and uncontrolled.

In 1972, Jim Montgomery wrote [*New Testament Fire in the Philippines*](#) about the Foursquare denomination in that country. The group was recording more than 50,000 conversions per year with only two missionary families. He attributed their relative poverty to their success.

The denominational model was:

- A. Build a large church in a capital city.
- B. Establish a Bible college.
- C. Ordain graduates, sending them to plant churches.

Things got away from them when a student had to leave school to take care of a parent. This “unfinished student” made disciples

and planted a church. The denomination wisely endorsed the man and the church. Then one of that pastor's disciples moved away, made disciples, and planted another church. The denomination embraced this as well. Now they had two pastors with "inferior" training, but they also had a movement on their hands. The fire soon burned out of control.

Toward the end of the book, Montgomery expressed fear that the book would cause the denomination to devote more money to the Philippines in the form of training institutions. He thought that doing so would curtail viral growth. They did, and growth slowed to a crawl.

Though the denomination saw itself as a franchise, for a few precious years it functioned as a multiplication movement of boutique churches. They created new support mechanisms—the wrong kind. The early lack of control caused each church to function as a boutique until they codified everything.

If you're the perceived leader of a movement, you better learn to write. Amazon makes small-volume publishing work through both Kindle and their Create Space paperback books. Working with them is easy, and there's no cost to you because it's print-on-demand, which means no one pays until they purchase something (btw, I don't work for Amazon or get a kickback for mentioning them—just find them useful).³² However you do it, you need to grow into a role as head cheerleader and hero maker.

CHAPTER 11

Summing Up

The future is never predictable. Trends continue for decades before some “tipping point” event or new innovation disrupts life as we know it. This can occur in imperceptible ways, or it may be a product of deliberate action. What we know for certain is that different outcomes only result from a change of input. The future of the Church is no exception.

Turning the Tide

Todd Wilson and Will Mancini’s book, [*Dream Big, Plan Smart*](#), begins with a question, “What will it take to move the multiplication needle from less than 4 percent of U.S. churches ever reproducing to greater than 10 percent?”³³ This presupposes that 10 percent and above is a tipping point, after which the church will regain influence in the culture. Ask yourself these questions:

- *What if we could get from 4 percent to 10 percent of churches reproducing? What might happen if we did?*
- *What if those churches planted one church every two years, beginning in 2020 (something my Russian friends think is too small a goal)?*

The answer is that if 10 percent of the estimated 330,000 churches in the United States planted one church per year between 2020 and 2040, we would grow to 785,903 churches (this figure does not include any compounding factor—it assumes that each newly planted church does nothing). The Church would grow by 138 percent compared to population growth by 13.4 percent. *We would outpace population growth.* That would change our culture. Factor in the fact that new churches usually reproduce more easily than established churches, and the numbers are unbelievable.

For just six percent of churches to begin reproducing is more than reasonable. It's within easy reach. It only takes a change of mindset. We need to think “more is better,” instead of “bigger is better.” We don't even have to abandon Level 3 behaviors to adapt to Level 5 accomplishment. We can, and should, pursue addition and multiplication at the same time. The sweet spot is where you add numbers, so you can increase multiplying capacity. A larger church has the capacity to spawn many new ones. Again, the distinction between a portal and a platform come to mind. I'd far rather die knowing that I was taking upwards of a million people to Heaven than to think I'd settled for the biggest church in the state.

So how can we get from church planting that doesn't keep up with population growth to church multiplication that shapes culture? The answer is for people like you to accept church multiplication as normal behavior for a church that has disciple

making as its purpose. I believe every church should multiply numerous times. If small churches currently do the heavy lifting, the future will look dramatically different than if successful Level 3 and 4 leaders get into the action. Some studies have shown that the churches who multiply are healthier and have an easier time finding internal leaders than those churches that don't multiply.

Multiplication Is God's Desire

In Genesis 1, God told mankind to multiply and fill the earth. Man's response was the tower of Babel.

In Genesis 11, everyone gathered rather than scattered as God had commanded. He had to disrupt Babel through confusion over language to accomplish His purposes.

In Acts 1, Jesus pressed toward multiplication that fills the earth. This time, the response was a megachurch in Jerusalem. It seems He unsettled things by allowing persecution that led in the direction of the yet unfulfilled prophecy: "For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea" (Habakkuk 2:14).

We are at a standstill in terms of cultural penetration. The surrounding world is rapidly secularizing— even growing hostile to Christ-followers. The population grows while the church does not. If we don't act, God will. If we change our paradigm, now, the future will be easier and brighter. If we do not, it will not.

'We Could Have Done More'

The Church is in trouble. That fact is undeniable. But it's not too late to turn the tide. We have a decade or so before we lose enough momentum and failure is the only option. If people like you and

me learn to multiply, we can see a good down payment on the Great Commission in our lifetime.

Someone recently asked me, “What would you do differently if you could live life again?” My answer, “not much.”

Given my family background, in addition to American and church culture at the time I was growing up, I would do pretty much everything I did. I have some regrets, but not many.

A different question is more meaningful, “What would you do if you were just out of high school and felt called to pastoral ministry?”

That was me. A Bible college degree, apprenticeship, and building the biggest church possible were my aspirations (I was thinking of about 200 people). If I was 18 years old in today’s climate, I would do lots of things differently.

For starters, I would trade professional theological education for someone who could disciple me into ministry.

I’d become an engineer, which reflects my native interests. Along with John Wesley, I would earn, save, and give all I could. Finally, I would seek to multiply a thousand “microchurches”—congregations planted by a pastor who intends to remain in their career and independent of the church for financial support. Hopefully, at least half of those would multiply further generations, and some would grow to “macro” status.

Alternatively, I would choose the same career path but change one thing. Instead of planting churches with Level 3 as the goal (as we did), I would use the concept of a microchurch to:

- Enlist more labor for the harvest.
- Hasten the multiplication rate of our churches.
- Aim to bring a million people into churches we planted.

As it stands, the movement we started includes around 200,000 active Christ followers—we could have done more. My question for you is, “Could you multiply microchurches?” If you pastor a megachurch coupled with multi-sites, microchurches is an inexpensive next step.

If you dropped out of pastoral ministry because your church and a separate job were too much for you, then you might give this another look. A microchurch should not take much more time than any high-commitment role in a larger church. If you can delegate, you should find it easy to look someone in the eye and say, “I put in my 40 hours this week, and I find time for this. I’m not asking any more of you than I ask of myself...”

Perhaps you lead one of those groups that dropped out of traditional evangelical churches for whatever reason. My challenge is simple: Don’t hide your light under a bushel, seek the Kingdom first, and multiply what you enjoy.

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